

The Celebrity

By JEROME K. JEROME



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THE CELEBRITY

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

BY
JEROME K. JEROME

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THE CHARACTERS

The celebrated JOHN PARABLE

His Friend, ARCHIBALD QUINCEY

His Betrothed, MISS BULLSTRODE

His Secretary, MISS DORTON

His Cook, COMFORT PRYCE

His Man-servant, ILLINGWORTH

His Caretaker, MRS. MEADOWS

His Rival, JOSEPH ONIONS

and

SUNNYBROOK JIM, *who went bail for him*

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Jerome, Jerome K.
The celebrity
1927.

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THE CELEBRITY

ACT I

SCENE: JOHN PARABLE'S study on the ground floor of his house in Buckingham Street, Strand, a spacious panelled room in the Adam style, lighted by two high windows. It used to be the dining-room, but after his father's death, the present JOHN PARABLE converted it into his workshop, finding the little room the other side of the passage sufficient for his own occasional select dinner parties. But the massive Georgian sideboard, and the two horsehair-covered easy-chairs, one each side of the fireplace, still remain.

JOHN PARABLE, one of the most talked-of men in London, is a busy writer and speech-maker, and his needs are chiefly books and papers. But there is a bit of the artist in him also. On the walls are one or two fine pictures, and a bust of Psyche by Rodin stands on a pedestal between the windows.

A clock on the mantelpiece strikes ten, and with the last stroke MISS DORTON, a youngish lady with large soulful eyes, neatly but severely dressed, enters and closes the door behind her. One did not hear her knock or ring, for the reason that, to save labor, PARABLE has provided her with a latch-key. She puts some papers she is carry-

ing on the large circular desk near to the windows, and passes into her den, a small apartment (formerly the pantry) led into by a door beside the fireplace. A minute later she returns, having taken off her outdoor things; and seating herself at the round table, attacks the pile of letters that are there awaiting her.

She is thus engaged, when ILLINGWORTH enters. One does not know his Christian name, butlers never having Christian names except in the bosom of their own families. ILLINGWORTH, a bachelor, who has been with the Parable family all his life (but for which he would not be there now, being deeply opposed to the present JOHN PARABLE'S political opinions), has probably, if he ever had one, forgotten it. He is the typical butler, imperturbable, chronically resigned, and constitutionally sad. He has come to give an eye to the fire.

MISS DORTON. (*Hearing but not seeing him*) Good morning, Illingworth.

ILLINGWORTH. Good morning, Miss Dorton.

MISS DORTON. Let Mr. Parable know I'm here, will you?

ILLINGWORTH. I'll mention it to him, when I see him.

MISS DORTON. (*She turns her head and looks at him*) What do you mean—"when you see him"?

ILLINGWORTH. I can hardly do it before. (*He is putting on coals.*)

MISS DORTON. (*She resumes her opening of letters, but she is puzzled*) You haven't forgotten there are three gentlemen coming to breakfast at eleven?

ILLINGWORTH. I have not forgotten it. (*He puts the accent on the "I."*)

MISS DORTON. (*This time she shows that she is*

puzzled) Where is—— You don't mean that he's still in bed?

ILLINGWORTH. (*He is hanging up the hearth-brush*) He is not in his bed.

(*There is a knock at the front door.*)

MISS DORTON. I expect that's Mr. Quincey. He has an appointment with Mr. Parable at ten o'clock.

(ILLINGWORTH goes out. After a moment, MISS BULLSTRODE'S vigorous voice is heard outside. "Morning, Illingworth. Miss Dorton inside?" and the door is burst in, rather than opened, and MISS BULLSTRODE enters. She is a woman of, say, five and thirty. In the costume of a lady, she would be attractive; but dressed (with the exception of the trousers) as a gentleman with eccentric taste in clothes, she is not at her best. Under a bowler hat, she wears her hair strained back from her forehead, and uses a stout walking-stick.)

MISS BULLSTRODE. Good morning.

MISS DORTON. Oh, it's you, Miss Bullstrode.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Slams the door and comes down*) Not up yet?

MISS DORTON. Yes, he is up; but he's not back yet.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Where's he gone?

MISS DORTON. I don't know. He sometimes goes for a short walk in the morning. I don't suppose he'll be long.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*She puts her stick and hat on a chair and seats herself at the desk opposite MISS DORTON*) Tell me, what is he doing—to-day and to-morrow?

MISS DORTON. Well, there are all these proofs of his new book.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Any public engagements—that he can't get out of?

MISS DORTON. He is speaking to-night for the Cats' Home at Battersea.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Never mind the cats. Anything else?

MISS DORTON. (*She consults the Engagement Book*) Destitute Actors at the Mansion House on Wednesday. Nothing on Thursday. On Friday—

MISS BULLSTRODE. He can be back by Friday. Destitute Actors he can speak for any time. I want him to come over to Ireland with me. We're founding a branch of the Marriage Reform Law League. He can bring his proofs with him, correct them in the train. I'll tell Illingworth to pack his bag. (*She rises.*)

MISS DORTON. I think you'd better wait and see him. He's keen about the cats, I know.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Um! Perhaps I had. You don't think he'll be long? (*She looks at her watch.*)

MISS DORTON. I shouldn't think so. I've never known him as late as this.

(ILLINGWORTH *enters with some letters.*)

MISS DORTON. (*Taking them*) Mr. Parable didn't say anything to you when he went out, did he?

ILLINGWORTH. He said nothing to me. (*Goes out.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. I'll give him ten minutes. (*She sits and takes up "The Times."*) Where was he speaking last night?

MISS DORTON. At the Caxton Hall, United Fabians. Oh, no, that was in the afternoon. He spoke

at the Opera House in the evening. Meeting to demand the release of Miss Clebb.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Woman who never pays her income tax?

MISS DORTON. Yes.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Nice girl! Sings well! How did he speak?

MISS DORTON. I don't know. I couldn't get away in the evening. (*A fearsome thought has come to MISS DORTON. She fixes her great eyes on MISS BULLSTRODE*) You don't think there's any danger of his ever—going off?

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*She was about to settle down to the paper. She looks up*) Going off? Whatever— Of course, he's got to die some time.

MISS DORTON. I don't mean that. I mean, of his ever getting slack—weary of well-doing?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Well, there isn't much sign of it at present. Why? What makes you think so?

MISS DORTON. Nothing palpable—that is, at least—— (*She turns in her chair so as to face MISS BULLSTRODE*) You know the Cholmondeley Society for the After-Care of the Insane?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Yes.

MISS DORTON. There are fourteen hundred feeble-minded women discharged from the asylums every year, partially cured. The question of course is what is to be done with them.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Yes, I suppose it is a problem.

MISS DORTON. I put it before him last Wednesday. They wanted him to write to *The Times*. He said—— (*There is a pregnant pause. MISS BULLSTRODE nerves herself.*) He said, "Oh, damn female lunatics, and the male ones too! I'm sick and tired of the lot of them!"

MISS BULLSTRODE. Um! You don't think he's been over-working himself? Not ill?

MISS DORTON. He doesn't give one the idea of being ill.

MISS BULLSTRODE. He might easily be. Nobody to look after him.

MISS DORTON. If he were to grow cold, indifferent! It would be so terrible.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*More to herself*) Too much alone. Wants bucking up.

MISS DORTON. (*Crying—but with restraint*) I do what I can. But I'm not always here.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Rises*) Of course not. Besides, it's not your business. Don't say anything to him. Just leave it till——

(*The door is opened and closed by ILLINGWORTH, allowing for the entry of ARCHIBALD QUINCEY, a stoutish little gentleman, immaculately dressed.*)

QUINCEY. Good morning, Miss Bullstrode. (*He shakes hands with MISS BULLSTRODE.*) Good morning, Miss Dorton. (*He shakes hands with MISS DORTON.*) Great man not up yet? (*He puts his hat on the head of Psyche.*)

MISS DORTON. He's gone out. (*MISS BULLSTRODE and MISS DORTON reseal themselves.*)

QUINCEY. Gone out? I've got an appointment with him.

MISS DORTON. I know. I don't expect he'll be long. He generally goes out for half an hour after breakfast with the dog.

QUINCEY. Then he's back.

MISS DORTON. I don't think so. Illingworth——

QUINCEY. Well, the dog is. Just met him on the doormat.

(*ILLINGWORTH comes in with letters.*)

MISS DORTON. (*Taking them*) Has Mr. Parable returned?

ILLINGWORTH. Not yet, Miss Dorton.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Didn't he go out with the dog?

ILLINGWORTH. The dog has not been out, as yet, Miss Bullstrode. (*He goes out.*)

QUINCEY. (*He sits*) Thought he hadn't, poor little beggar.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Then where is he? Hasn't been called away anywhere, has he?

MISS DORTON. I should have known it.

QUINCEY. Where *was* he last night?

MISS DORTON. At the Opera House meeting for the release of Miss Clebb. He was the chief speaker.

QUINCEY. No, he wasn't!

MISS DORTON. It is a matter of opinion. He was one of the speakers, anyhow.

QUINCEY. Not even that. I was at the *Chronicle* office till eleven o'clock last night. No report of any speech by John Parable.

MISS DORTON. Oh, but it's impossible!

MISS BULLSTRODE. Perhaps he was there but didn't speak.

QUINCEY. You think that likely?

MISS DORTON. But I wrote the appointment myself, in his notebook.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*She has found the place in the paper*) You are quite right. "Great disappointment was experienced by the meeting owing to the unavoidable absence of Mr. Parable, who was to have been the chief speaker. His place was taken by Mr. Lansbury." (*They all look at one another.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. Something must have happened. Doesn't Illingworth know?

MISS DORTON. Illingworth, when he doesn't wish to convey information, is not above lying.

QUINCEY. (*Sotto voce*) Invaluable man!

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*She rises*) You'd better get on the 'phone. Miss Ellis is sure to know. He must have sent some explanation to the meeting.

MISS DORTON. Yes. Yes, perhaps she may. (*She goes into her den.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. Funny thing! What do you think?

QUINCEY. (*Shrugs his shoulders*) The wonder to me is that he can remember as much as he does.

MISS BULLSTRODE. But it was down in his—— You don't think he's doing too much, do you?

QUINCEY. There's an opinion to that effect in certain quarters.

MISS BULLSTRODE. I don't mean that. I mean, you don't think he's working too hard—not taking sufficient care of himself? You see, he's no one to look after him, no one about him but servants——

QUINCEY. (*He has whipped out a notebook and pencil*) When does the wedding take place?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Well, don't you think I ought to?

QUINCEY. What does he say himself about it? You've discussed it with him, or not?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Yes, yes, he's quite agreeable.

QUINCEY. That seems to settle the matter.

MISS BULLSTRODE. You think so?

QUINCEY. Only *one* thing necessary to be done—or rather two.

MISS BULLSTRODE. What?

QUINCEY. For you to put yourself into a woman's frock and get your hair waved.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Frock! Hair! Oh, it won't be that sort of marriage at all.

QUINCEY. Oh!

MISS BULLSTRODE. It will be the highest form of marriage; the union of man and woman for noble

ends. He is the better fighter. I shall be always by his side to guide, to help, to cheer him.

QUINCEY. Don't see why you couldn't do all that just as well with your hair waved.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Can you see me with my hair waved?

QUINCEY. Perhaps you are right. How about curls?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Doesn't it occur to you that if I were that sort of woman I shouldn't be thinking of marrying John Parable?

QUINCEY. Why not?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Because John Parable would live with a woman for ten years and not know whether she wore her hair in curls or a pigtail.

QUINCEY. I feel sure he would notice the pigtail.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Possibly—if it got into the soup. I regard John Parable as one of the greatest modern forces working for progress. I'm going to marry him so that I can watch over him as a trainer watches over a prize-fighter; I'm going to see that he has his meals regularly and that he eats them. I'm going to see that he has eight hours' sleep a day and two hours' exercise—that he doesn't get wet feet and wears Jaeger next his skin.

QUINCEY. Have you put it to him that way?

MISS BULLSTRODE. He knows I'm not marrying him for love—not in the ordinary sense of the word.

QUINCEY. Um! What's he marrying you for? Can't he put on his Jaegers himself?

MISS BULLSTRODE. He'd never think of them. Besides——

(ILLINGWORTH comes in with a telegram. He glances at MISS DORTON'S empty chair and goes on into the den.)

MISS BULLSTRODE. I must be off. If he comes back before you go, tell him I want to see him. I am only going round to Clement's Inn. *(She gathers up her things and lets herself out, slamming the front door after her.)*

(ILLINGWORTH emerges from the den.)

QUINCEY. *(He has settled himself down with "The Times")* You haven't any notion, Illingworth, where your master is—as between man and man?

ILLINGWORTH. I am quite at a loss to imagine. Mr. Parable—so far as his own affairs are concerned—I should describe as a man of habit.

QUINCEY. His habit being to go out every morning.

ILLINGWORTH. About nine o'clock.

QUINCEY. And he went out this morning—about nine o'clock?

ILLINGWORTH. I was not here when Mr. Parable went out this morning.

QUINCEY. Um! Were you here when Mr. Parable came in last night?

ILLINGWORTH. Mr. Parable, when he comes home late, always lets himself in very quietly and goes straight to bed.

QUINCEY. Thank you! *(ILLINGWORTH is going.)* Illingworth!

ILLINGWORTH. *(Stops)* Yes, sir.

QUINCEY. If ever you contemplate making a change, you might let me know.

ILLINGWORTH. I thank you, sir. *(He goes out.)*

(QUINCEY again takes up "The Times." One of the windows is open. A barrel-organist starts playing in the street outside. QUINCEY closes the window and returns to his seat. Suddenly he hears a faint sound (PARABLE'S key in the front

door) and listens. *The next moment the door is opened, cautiously, and JOHN PARABLE's head looks in. Seeing that there is nobody in the room but QUINCEY, JOHN PARABLE enters and closes the door.*

(JOHN PARABLE is a distinguished-looking man of about forty. He wears an overcoat with the collar turned up, and a very new-looking billy-cock hat.)

QUINCEY. (*Goes on reading "The Times"*) Good morning! (PARABLE takes no notice of QUINCEY, but moves softly across the room to MISS DORTON's door and listens.) Had a pleasant walk?

PARABLE. (*Satisfied that MISS DORTON is busy and has not heard him come in*) Yes.

QUINCEY. Didn't take the dog.

PARABLE. (*Not interested in the subject*) No.

QUINCEY. Thought you hadn't. Miss Bullstrode has just gone. Is coming back again.

PARABLE. (*He has crossed to the table and taken up some letters*) What's she want?

QUINCEY. Something important, I think. (PARABLE grunts.) Nice hat. New?

PARABLE. (*Not catching QUINCEY's meaning for the moment. Then, understanding, he takes off his hat and puts it down on a small table near the fire*) Yes.

QUINCEY. Quite a useful disguise—if ever you wanted one. (*They exchange a glance.*) John Parable and his soft grey felt. Why, it's almost a trademark.

PARABLE. Why the devil did you persuade me to learn boxing?

QUINCEY. (*Shrugs his shoulders*) You wanted exercise; said you hadn't time for golf. How are you getting on?

PARABLE. Do you know what I'd like to do?

(He takes off his overcoat, throws it over a chair)
Show you how I am getting on.

QUINCEY. Sorry. I never take exercise in the morning. What's happened?

PARABLE. If I hadn't rather fancied myself as a light-weight, and a man two stone heavier than myself and a good ten years younger had suggested my leaving the Arts and Crafts Exhibition by the nearest exit and without another moment's delay—well, I should have been annoyed. Might possibly have threatened that if he dared to lay a hand upon me I should give him in charge—proper and sensible thing to have done. *(His eye catches sight of QUINCEY'S hat)* What blithering idiot put this thing here? *(He snatches it off the statue. QUINCEY hurriedly rescues it from him and places it under his own chair.)* Hanging your confounded hat on a head of Psyche by Rodin! Don't you do that again.

QUINCEY. Instead of which——?

PARABLE. Instead of behaving like a muddled medical student on Guy Fawkes' Night and biffing him one in the eye.

QUINCEY. *(Becoming interested)* Was he any use?

PARABLE. In a rough-and-tumble sort of way, yes. Came on with a rush. Just stopped him in time. One in the pit.

QUINCEY. Bully!

PARABLE. *(The joy of battle coming back to him)* That made him more careful. We sparred a few minutes for position. I let him wind himself a bit: then I got in a jab on the jaw: he answered with a lunge and just missed me. That gave me my first real chance. I feinted with my left as he came round, and before he could recover himself, got in the loveliest uppercut you ever saw—right on his smeller. He went down like an Aunt Sally. When he came up——

QUINCEY. What were the police doing all this time?

PARABLE. (*His mercury goes down quite suddenly*) The police turned up in the third round. May have been less, seemed to me about a hundred of them.

QUINCEY. Vine Street?

PARABLE. I believe it was Vine Street. (*He goes to the desk and begins reading letters.*)

QUINCEY. What were you doing at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition?

PARABLE. I suppose I can go to an Exhibition if I like, can't I?

QUINCEY. Oughtn't you to have been speaking at the Opera House for Miss Clebb?

PARABLE. Yesterday morning I wrote a two and a half column article to be translated into seven languages, advocating the cause of universal peace. At one o'clock I attended a lunch at the Mansion House and spoke for twenty minutes on Prison Reform. I had just time to drive to Caxton Hall, where I spoke for an hour—gathering of Provincial Fabians. At five o'clock I attended a meeting of the I.L.P. and gave them my views on Syndicalism. I didn't leave the House of Commons till nearly seven o'clock. Why can't the silly woman pay her income tax like the rest of us, and look pleasant?

QUINCEY. Um! (*He has another idea*) Why was he so anxious you should leave by the nearest exit—and without another moment's loss of time?

PARABLE. (*He doesn't answer too readily*) Said he was engaged to her. (*QUINCEY rises.*) Don't believe for a moment that he was. Even so, does that give a man the right to dictate to a woman—here in the twentieth century? It is men like that, I tell you, that——

QUINCEY. Where did you pick her up? At the Exhibition?

PARABLE. (*Very indignant*) What do you mean, "Pick her up"? A friend of mine. Met her in St. James's Park.

QUINCEY. By appointment?

PARABLE. (*More indignant*) No—by chance. Went into St. James's Park after I left the House of Commons, to think over my speech. Sat down on a seat opposite the pelican, turned my head, and found I was sitting beside her.

QUINCEY. Do I know her?

PARABLE. How do I know whether you know her?

QUINCEY. Well, who was she? What was her name?

PARABLE. Can't think of her name—always was a duffer at remembering names.

QUINCEY. (*Who is not of a believing nature*) Did she know you?

PARABLE. How the devil could I know her if she didn't know me? Know her quite well. A member of something or other, I suppose. Fabian in all probability. (*He is still reading—or thinks he is reading—his letters.*)

QUINCEY. Why a Fabian?

PARABLE. I don't know. Looked like a Fabian—the better sort of Fabian.

QUINCEY. Young?

PARABLE. Yes.

QUINCEY. Interesting?

PARABLE. One of the most interesting women I have ever met: so human, so simple in the best sense of the word, so——

QUINCEY. Where did you dine? (PARABLE *hesitates.*) Remember?

PARABLE. A cheerful sort of place, with a band. Can't remember its name.

QUINCEY. And after that? Was it she who suggested the Exhibition?

PARABLE. No, it was not. It was I suggested it. It was I suggested we should dine together. She didn't want to do it—not at first. I ordered champagne, not because I like champagne—as a matter of fact I don't—but because I wanted for once in my life to behave like an ordinary damned tom-fool. I suggested the Arts and Crafts Exhibition because I overheard a man at the next table saying there was a good floor there for dancing. I haven't danced for fifteen years: thought I'd like to try it. I didn't forget Miss Clebb: in case I had, she reminded me of Miss Clebb and at first would not so much as listen to the idea. I told her I wasn't going to speak for Miss Clebb in any case: that for ten years I had been doing little else but write and think and talk about the whole confounded family of Clebbs; and I intended, for once, having an evening off. If you can't understand it, I can't help you. (*Returns to his letters.*)

QUINCEY. And did he—her fiancé—come up and threaten you while you were dancing with her?

PARABLE. We had *been* dancing. We were sitting out. (*Unconsciously he smiles to himself, evidently at interesting recollections.*)

QUINCEY. When does the case come on?

PARABLE. I don't know. Some time next week.

QUINCEY. We'll postpone our "interview." May be able to get some interesting prison experiences out of you.

PARABLE. Quite possible.

QUINCEY. (*He is collecting his hat and gloves*) Pity you can't remember her name. Might have included her in the interview. (*At door*) Don't forget. Miss Bullstrode's coming. Ta-ta. (*Goes out.*)

PARABLE. Funny thing! Know her face quite well. Wonder if she's in the Address Book. (*Opens a drawer and takes out an Address Book. He is seated, turning over its pages, when* MISS DORTON

emerges from her den. She is not surprised at seeing PARABLE; she must have heard the voices. She is deeply desirous of questioning him, but feels that this is not the moment. She searches on the table for a letter.)

MISS DORTON. You haven't forgotten that you are breakfasting Gustave Brune and two other French gentlemen at half-past eleven?

PARABLE. You don't happen to know a lady—a youngish lady—in a hat with yellow roses and a square-cut bodice? Can't think of her name!

MISS DORTON. Does she always wear a hat with yellow roses?

PARABLE. No. No, I suppose not.

MISS DORTON. Where did you meet her—at the Caxton Hall? If so, it might be Miss Pomeroy: she generally likes to show her back.

PARABLE. Pomeroy—no. *(Returns to his book.)*

MISS DORTON. You weren't at the Opera House meeting last night.

PARABLE. Opera? Oh, Miss Clebb. No! Was called away suddenly. Had to go to—to Croydon. Aunt taken ill.

MISS DORTON. Miss Upjohn?

PARABLE. Yes.

MISS DORTON. I thought she lived at Kew?

PARABLE. Kew? Oh—she's moved.

MISS DORTON. I'd better have her new address, hadn't I?

PARABLE. No; don't worry. She's going to move back again. *(To himself with book)* Baylis, Hilda. No.

MISS DORTON. *(She has found her letter—is on her way out)* Miss Bullstrode wants to see you. *(PARABLE grunts.)* Is coming back in— *(She sees for the first time the new hat.)* Has anybody been here—any gentleman—besides Mr. Quincey?

PARABLE. No, not that I know of.—“Corker”—

MISS DORTON. Then whose hat is this? (*She holds it out. He snatches it from her.*)

PARABLE. Can't you see that I'm thinking? Haven't you anything to do? Do you want something to do?

MISS DORTON. No. Yes.

PARABLE. Well, then, do get on with it, there's a dear girl. We're wasting all the morning.

(MISS DORTON, *sad and bewildered*, retires again into her den. PARABLE, *making sure he is alone*, puts his new hat under one of the easy-chairs on which he sits, with his Address Book still in his hand. He is absorbed in it when ILLINGWORTH enters with more letters. Seeing PARABLE, he halts.)

ILLINGWORTH. Good morning, sir.

PARABLE. Morning.

ILLINGWORTH. Shall I take them in to Miss Dorton?

PARABLE. No; put them down. (ILLINGWORTH *arranges them on the table.*) You don't know a lady, Illingworth—a youngish, good-looking lady—three little curls each side? Can't think of her name. Has rather a pleasant laugh.

ILLINGWORTH. Don't remember having seen her, sir. Not here, sir. Have you breakfasted, sir?

PARABLE. Yes. Yes, thanks. (*He feels that ILLINGWORTH is looking at him and that explanation is necessary*) Was called away last night.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir.

PARABLE. Had to go to—(*Stops himself and thinks. He will have it right this time*)—to Kew. Miss Upjohn, my aunt, you know, taken suddenly ill.

ILLINGWORTH. I am sorry, sir. Better this morning?

PARABLE. Yes. Yes, thanks. Both doing well.

ILLINGWORTH. I am pleased to hear it, sir. I am not quite sure what I ought to do about those three gentlemen who are coming at half-past eleven.

PARABLE. Why? What's the difficulty?

ILLINGWORTH. Well, sir, it's pretty nearly eleven now, and there's nothing ready. So far as I can see, no chance of anything being ready.

PARABLE. Why not? You knew about it!

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir. I sent instructions down into the kitchen yesterday afternoon.

PARABLE. Well, then!

ILLINGWORTH. Well, sir, the trouble is that Cook has only just returned.

PARABLE. Just returned?

ILLINGWORTH. Last night was her evening out. She left a little after six and has only just come in.

PARABLE. You mean she's been out all night?

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir.

PARABLE. But we can't have this sort of thing, Illingworth.

ILLINGWORTH. No, sir. *(He collects PARABLE'S coat, but looks in vain for a hat.)*

PARABLE. Out from six o'clock last night! What explanation, what—— *(The Address Book slips from his hand. He stares into space. The word "Cook" escapes from him in a whisper.)*

ILLINGWORTH. I think, sir, if you don't mind, I would like you to see her yourself. It would be more effective than my speaking to her.

PARABLE. Have I ever seen her before, Illingworth?

ILLINGWORTH. I brought her in when we engaged her, sir. You may have passed her once or twice on the stairs. Rather a superior young woman, I have always regarded her—hitherto.

PARABLE. Yes. Yes. I'll see her myself, Illingworth.

ILLINGWORTH. Thank you, sir.

PARABLE. Send her up.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir. (*Goes out.*)

(PARABLE rises. *He picks up the Address Book and puts it back in its drawer. He takes up a letter, opens it, and throws it into the waste-paper basket, retaining the envelope in his hand. And then the door opens softly and COMFORT PRYCE enters. She wears a cook's cap; and her frock, which she has not had time to change, is hidden under her cook's apron. Even so, she is undoubtedly an attractive-looking young woman. She closes the door behind her, and stands there with her back to it. PARABLE turns, and they look at one another. A faint smile is about to creep over MISS PRYCE's face. She instantly suppresses it.*)

PARABLE. Good morning—Cook.

COMFORT. Good morning, sir.

PARABLE. Sit down. (*He indicates a chair near the desk. She sits on it. He goes towards MISS DORTON's door, and, satisfied from the clicking of her typewriter that she is occupied, returns to MISS PRYCE.*) So it was you.

COMFORT. I'm sorry, sir. Of course, if you had been an ordinary gentleman, I should have guessed what had happened and have put you right. But—well, you being a Socialist, sir, and remembering all you've said and written about the absurdity of class distinctions, it did just occur to me that perhaps you did know who I was, and—(*She looks up at him*)—that it made no difference to you.

PARABLE. Yes, all that's quite right, Cook. But merely as a matter of history, I must remind you that you spoke first.

COMFORT. Yes, sir. But, if you will forgive my

saying so, you were looking at me as if you wished I would. Or was I mistaken?

PARABLE. No, you were not.

COMFORT. Of course it was wrong, the whole thing. I don't know what it was that came over me last night. Curiosity, I suppose. It began by getting woman into trouble.

PARABLE. And man too. She saw to that. What were you curious about? Me? (*He takes a chair and sits facing her.*)

COMFORT. That was the beginning of it. You see, sir, generally speaking, you are always on a platform or doing something surrounded by banners, and—well, I felt so curious to see what you would be like on your evening out, so to speak.

PARABLE. Disappointed?

COMFORT. N-no. No; you were quite interesting, after you'd got over your shyness. Of course, I never dreamt I was letting myself in for a whole evening with you. I thought that after dinner you would go off to your meeting.

PARABLE. You ought to have been firm, Cook. You might have known I am not used to dinners with—(*He looks at her*)—ladies of your age.

COMFORT. Yes, I ought. I ought to have gone to the pictures. Spent the evening in the dark all by myself. That is what I intended to do when I came out. I should have, if I hadn't been sorry for you.

PARABLE. For me?

COMFORT. Well, you do seem to have a dull time of it, working eighteen hours a day for everybody but yourself and never having any fun. (*She looks at him again*) And you did enjoy it. You were getting on quite wonderfully with the Tango.

PARABLE. I believe I could have got into it in another couple of dances, if that idiot hadn't turned up, and— Are you engaged to him?

COMFORT. No, certainly not. He had no right

to interfere. I may not absolutely have refused him. I have certainly never accepted him.

PARABLE. Who is he?

COMFORT. Oh, just a man I used to know when I was in service at Hammersmith and attended the Rowan Street Chapel. He's a House Agent and Collector there. You must have surprised him!

PARABLE. Yes, I fancy I handled him rather neatly.

COMFORT. I was frightened at first, till I saw how good you were.

PARABLE. You hardly expected the celebrated John Parable, the mere talker, the—— What is your name?

COMFORT. Pryce, sir. Comfort Pryce.

PARABLE. Have you always been a cook?

COMFORT. I wasn't born one.

PARABLE. What were you born?

COMFORT. A farmer's daughter.

PARABLE. What made you take to cooking?

COMFORT. I had to do something for a living. It's better paid than most things.

PARABLE. You are very good.

COMFORT. Thank you, sir.

PARABLE. But you don't look like one.

COMFORT. Perhaps I shall when I've been at it longer.

PARABLE. I wonder. Take those things off. I want to have a look at you as you were last night.

COMFORT. But suppose somebody——

PARABLE. Do as I tell you. Don't argue. (*She takes off her cap and apron.*) No. You'll never— Where are the curls? (*With a deft movement of her fingers she reproduces them. She had pinned them back under her cap. He draws his chair nearer to her.*) Was it only curiosity?

COMFORT. At first.

PARABLE. And afterwards? Was it only to give me a treat? Not thinking of yourself at all?

COMFORT. Oughtn't I to be getting to work? There are some gentlemen coming to a late breakfast, aren't there?

PARABLE. Never mind them. I'll take them across to Gatti's. How did you enjoy your evening out?

COMFORT. More than was good for me.

PARABLE. What do you mean—"more than was good for you"?

COMFORT. Well, sir, it isn't often a young woman in my position gets the opportunity of meeting a clever, brilliant man who devotes his whole evening to being agreeable to her.

PARABLE. Then I was agreeable to you? (*She does not answer, but gravely nods.*) Why should it be bad for you? Why—— (*MISS DORTON is there; he sees it from COMFORT's face. He rises and pushes back his chair.*) What is it? What is it?

MISS DORTON. (*Her universe seems to be going to pieces in front of her eyes*) I didn't know you were engaged. (*She goes back the way she came.*)

PARABLE. Never can get a minute. It's in and out—in and out.

(*The door flies open. MISS BULLSTRODE bursts in like a cheerful east wind. COMFORT has risen.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. So glad—— (*She halts.*) So sorry. Your man didn't tell me you were engaged. (*Advancing*) Do I know this lady?

PARABLE. Miss Bullstrode—Miss Pryce. (*MISS BULLSTRODE with a smile is just beginning, "Delighted to——"*) My cook! (*MISS BULLSTRODE does not quite know what to do. COMFORT saves*

her the trouble of deciding by gathering up her cap and apron and going straight out.)

MISS BULLSTRODE. Rather an unusual sort of cook.

PARABLE. One of the best.

MISS BULLSTRODE. *(If it were any other man than JOHN PARABLE, MISS BULLSTRODE would have her suspicions. But the idea is too absurd.)* You weren't at the meeting last night.

PARABLE. Was called away suddenly—into the country. *(MISS DORTON is there. He sees it from MISS BULLSTRODE's expression. He turns.)* Can't you keep still for one single instant?

MISS DORTON. It's Miss Ellis. She's on the telephone. She wants to know how your aunt is this morning.

PARABLE. What's it got to do with Miss Ellis? Who is Miss Ellis?

MISS DORTON. She wants to send a paragraph round to the Press—why you weren't at the meeting last night.

PARABLE. I don't want any paragraph sent to the Press. Can't a man—— I'll answer her myself.

MISS DORTON. She must send some explanation.

PARABLE. Don't keep talking; there's a good girl. You know how I hate it. Do for goodness' sake go and sit down somewhere. Take the dog out if you want exercise. *(He almost pushes her out. Closes the door, locks it, puts the key in his pocket.)* She's in and out, in and out; it's getting to be a disease with her. *(He goes to the desk and takes up the telephone.)* Hullo! No; Mr. Parable himself. Don't send any paragraphs to the Press. Hates seeing her name in print. No, only a relation by marriage. Yes. All right this morning. Much better. Good-bye.

MISS BULLSTRODE. What was the matter with her—your aunt?

PARABLE. Do you want the truth?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Well——

PARABLE. I was not at the meeting to demand the release of Miss Clebb for the simple reason that I was locked up myself in a police cell, and couldn't get out.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Locked up! What for?

PARABLE. For defending a lady from insult. Yesterday evening I dropped in at the Exhibition. I was sitting on a chair——

(QUINCEY enters.)

QUINCEY. (*He hesitates with the door in his hand*) Can I speak to you a minute?

PARABLE. What about?

QUINCEY. Well——

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Divining the reason for his hesitation*) Mr. Parable has just told me that last night he was locked up—in a police cell.

QUINCEY. (*Relieved at finding that she knows all about it*) Oh! (*He closes the door.*) Well, as it happens, he wasn't.

PARABLE. Yes, I was. I remember it distinctly.

QUINCEY. You must be dreaming.

PARABLE. I tell you I spent last night in a police cell. I didn't dream. I didn't even go to sleep.

QUINCEY. Well, where? Where was the police cell?

PARABLE. I don't know. One of 'em.

QUINCEY. You said it was Vine Street.

PARABLE. No, I didn't. It was you suggested Vine Street.

QUINCEY. (*He turns to MISS BULLSTRODE*) He told me it was Vine Street. I've just come from Vine Street. They don't know anything about him.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Where was it? You must remember.

PARABLE. No, I needn't, if I don't. They took me there in a cab, and I didn't ask any questions. You settle it among yourselves. (*He leaves them and goes to his desk.*) I've got all these proofs to correct. I've got to prepare a speech demanding the release of somebody's cat. There's the Destitute Actors on Thursday. Do leave me alone. (*He goes on muttering to himself while rummaging among his papers.*) It's talk, talk, talk. (*Goes on talking.*)

QUINCEY. (*He and MISS BULLSTRODE talk in low voices the opposite side of the room*) He's mad! I saw the Inspector myself. There's no such name on the charge-sheet.

PARABLE. (*Still talking to himself*) As if it mattered a damn where the damn cell was.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Overwork. We must get him away at once—into the country. (*She goes to the door leading to MISS DORTON'S room.*) I'll tell Miss Dorton—— (*Finds it locked. She looks over her shoulder at QUINCEY.*) It's locked!

QUINCEY. Locked?

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*She taps at the door*) Miss Dorton. Please open the door at once.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*She stoops, her ear to the keyhole. Turns again to QUINCEY*) He's locked her in!

QUINCEY. Locked her in?

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*She crosses to PARABLE*) Have you locked Miss Dorton in?

PARABLE. Yes. Only way to keep her there.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Give me the key.

PARABLE. (*He does so*) Everybody in and out, in and out. It's like keeping chickens.

MISS BULLSTRODE. I've been fearing this.

QUINCEY. But where could he have been? All last night?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Thank God nothing happened to him. (*She has opened the door. MISS DORTON*

comes out.) Oh, Miss Dorton, will you please send a wire to Mrs. Meadows at once. Tell her to expect Mr. Parable down at the Cottage this afternoon. He will be stopping there for some days.

MISS DORTON. But——

MISS BULLSTRODE. You must cancel everything. *(Taps her head)* Nervous breakdown. Perfect rest. It's our only chance.

MISS DORTON. But these people who are coming to breakfast!

MISS BULLSTRODE. Put on your hat. We'll meet them at the station and explain it to them. We must get him away.

(MISS DORTON goes into her den; returns a minute later in her hat and jacket.)

QUINCEY. But will he go?

MISS BULLSTRODE. I shall insist upon it. *(She goes across to PARABLE and lays a kindly hand on his shoulder)* John, dear.

PARABLE. What is it? What is it now?

MISS BULLSTRODE. There's something I want you to do for me.

PARABLE. Then I can't do it. I've got to correct all these proofs. I've got——

MISS BULLSTRODE. *(Interrupting)* Yes, dear. That's just what I want you to do. I want you to take them down with you into the country, where you will be perfectly quiet. All by yourself.

PARABLE. *(He looks up)* What do you mean—"all by myself"? Without anybody else there at all? None of you?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Without anybody, but just Mrs. Meadows to look after you.

PARABLE. *(He jumps up)* Why didn't I think of it before? *(Begins to collect papers.)*

MISS BULLSTRODE. I've sent Mrs. Meadows a wire. You can catch the two-thirty.

PARABLE. (*Still collecting*) What's wrong with the twelve-twenty-five?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Well, if you think you can manage it.

PARABLE. I can if you all go away and leave me alone.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*She intimates her delight to the other two*) Don't worry about anything. Miss Dorton and I will fix up everything.

QUINCEY. If there is anything I can do——

PARABLE. See Miss Bullstrode into a cab and take Miss Dorton out for a walk. Take her out for the day—cheer her up. (*She is crying.*) Good-bye. (*He shakes hands with QUINCEY. He kisses MISS BULLSTRODE, to her intense astonishment, as also to that of the other two.*) Good-bye. (*He kisses MISS DORTON, to the more intense astonishment, if possible, of the three of them.*) Good-bye. Take her to Hampton Court. (*Returns to his packing.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. You will go?

PARABLE. (*He stops with papers in his hand*) Can't you see I'm going? What do you think I'm doing? How can I go with everybody interrupting me so that I don't know what I'm putting into my bag—(*He takes out a book and flings it across the room*)—and what I'm not. (*He goes on talking to himself while packing.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*To MISS DORTON*) Have you got that wire? (*MISS DORTON shows it. They all three move towards the door.*)

PARABLE. (*He breaks into song*) "In the morn I bring thee violets."

QUINCEY. Do you think he will get there safe?

PARABLE. "Which at evening I have culled."

MISS BULLSTRODE. I'll tell Illingworth to see him into the train.

QUINCEY. And tip the guard.

(At the doorway they pause and look at him. He has his back to them. He goes on singing. MISS DORTON bursts into sobs. He turns. They have the idea that he is going to throw something at them. They bundle themselves out, leaving the door open behind them. A moment later the front door is heard to slam.)

PARABLE. Illingworth. *(Louder)* Illingworth.

ILLINGWORTH. *(From downstairs)* In one minute, sir.

PARABLE. Pack my bag, at once.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir.

PARABLE. And get me a taxi. I'm going down to the Cottage by the twelve-twenty-five.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir.

PARABLE. *(He is still busy, now putting things into his bag, and now taking them out. It doesn't seem to matter to him which.)* And, Illingworth, Illingworth!

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir.

PARABLE. Tell Cook to get ready immediately. I'm taking her with me. *(Resumes his singing, "In the morn," etc.)*

CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE: *The living-room of JOHN PARABLE'S cottage in the Chiltern Hills. It is a pleasant little cottage, built, one would say, about the time of Queen Anne; and PARABLE has had the good sense to leave it alone, buying for it furniture that seems to belong to it. The time is twilight. MRS. MEADOWS, a motherly, placid soul, the widow of the village blacksmith, is laying the gate-legged table in the middle of the room for dinner. Most of the things she needs—napery, glasses, cutlery, etc.—are in an old cheese-cup-board that stands against the wall opposite the window, and just above the door.*

She has not got far before COMFORT enters. COMFORT had only time to bundle a few things into a bag before PARABLE swept her away into the taxi. She still wears the frock that she wore to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition last night.

COMFORT. (*Watches a moment*) How many are you laying for?

MRS. MEADOWS. For three. You and me, and 'im.

COMFORT. (*With a laugh*) Is that the latest?

MRS. MEADOWS. Up to the present. Did you get the jelly?

COMFORT. Yes. We bicycled to Henley for it. He said he knew the way. We lost it three times.

MRS. MEADOWS. Yes. I thought you must have lost the way.

COMFORT. I do hope people won't get talking.

He would insist on my coming down here with him. (*Puts on her cap and apron. They were hanging on the door.*)

MRS. MEADOWS. Can't say I was sorry to see you. I never was much of a cook myself, as my poor dead husband used often to remark to me. And as for people talking! What I always say is one may just as well give them something to talk about and save them the trouble of making it up.

COMFORT. If I were a plain, middle-aged woman it would be all right.

MRS. MEADOWS. Perhaps you will be, all in good time.

COMFORT. (*She glances at herself in the glass over the fireplace*) Not much sign of it. What do you think I ought to do? (*She sits by the table, and leans her arms upon it.*)

MRS. MEADOWS. What do you want to do—yourself?

COMFORT. Make myself look as nice as possible, and do all I can to attract his attention.

MRS. MEADOWS. In that case, dearie, there don't seem much to talk about, does there?

COMFORT. What's the harm! I've heard him from a dozen platforms ridiculing class distinctions, saying it's all nonsense. Besides, my people have been farmers for generations. What was Miss Bullstrode's father but a grocer? He kept a hundred shops instead of one. That only makes it a hundred times worse. Why shouldn't I?

MRS. MEADOWS. (*Going to and fro about her work*) When did it all begin? When did he first take notice of you?

COMFORT. Yesterday afternoon. He'd never seen me before. I was just "Cook"—something in a cap and apron that he passed occasionally on the stairs. Yesterday he saw me in my best clothes and fell in love with me. He doesn't know it himself—poor

dear!—not yet. But that's what he's done. (*She begins to cry.*)

MRS. MEADOWS. What are your feelings towards him? To be honest like. He's rather a good catch for a young person in your position.

COMFORT. That's my trouble. (*She is still crying.*) I can't help thinking of that. And then to be Mrs. Parable, wife of the great celebrity, John Parable. That's enough to turn any woman's head.

MRS. MEADOWS. He'd be a bit difficult to live with, I should say.

COMFORT. Geniuses always are. It's easy enough if you just think of them as children. He'd be a bit fractious at times, that's all. Underneath he's just the kindest, dearest——

MRS. MEADOWS. I should titivate myself up if I were you, dearie, and come in to dinner. He might do worse.

COMFORT. (*Drying her eyes*) He will, if somebody doesn't——

(PARABLE *charges in.*)

PARABLE. Dinner ready?

COMFORT. (*Rises*) It will be as soon as we are.

PARABLE. (*He takes a tray from* MRS. MEADOWS) You go and change your frock, Mrs. Meadows. I'll finish laying the table.

MRS. MEADOWS. You won't mind black, sir, will you? I had it new for my dear husband's funeral.

PARABLE. Well, if it won't depress you, Mrs. Meadows.

MRS. MEADOWS. It won't depress me, sir, if it doesn't anybody else. He had a fair innings and enjoyed his victuals up to the very last day. (*Goes out.*)

PARABLE. Good idea of mine, all dining together.

Don't you think so? Saves labor. The amount of time and labor that is wasted in this world——

COMFORT. (*She is helping him*) Did you and Mrs. Meadows always dine together, down here?

PARABLE. (*Suddenly puzzled*) No. Now, why did I never think of it?

COMFORT. Does seem a bit odd.

PARABLE. There was Mrs. Meadows, a pleasant, chatty old party with a fund of local anecdote, dining by herself in the kitchen; and here I used to sit with a blue-book propped up in front of me. I've been allowing myself to get too much into a groove. I intend for the future to mix more with the people—the plain, wholesome people: people like—like you and—and Mrs. Meadows.

COMFORT. (*She has taken the laying of the table out of his hands. He walks about and talks. Now and then he plunges in to her assistance, taking things from her and putting them in the wrong places, bringing things that are not wanted, etc., etc. She rectifies these mistakes in silence*) It would be a change for you.

PARABLE. It's what I ought to have done long ago. Intellectual, brainy people: interesting enough in their way; but one can have too much of them. What I've got to do is to freshen myself up. Get into contact with simple, everyday folk like—like you and—and Mrs. Meadows.

COMFORT. When did all this occur to you?

PARABLE. When?—let me see! I remember. It was while I was talking to you in St. James's Park. It came over me like a wave. I said—you may have forgotten—I said: "Hang Miss Clebb! Let's have an evening together, all by ourselves."

COMFORT. Would any young woman, sitting alone on a seat in St. James's Park, have had the same effect on you?

PARABLE. (*Thinking it out*) No. No, I felt in-

stinctively that you were what I wanted. I said to myself while we were dancing—I said: “This is doing me good.” I felt it. How old am I?

COMFORT. Forty. According to “Who’s Who.”

PARABLE. Four—— Are you sure?

COMFORT. That’s what I make it.

PARABLE. (*Seeing a way out*) In years. Always a mistake to judge age by mere years. Now, how old would you say I felt?

COMFORT. From the way you went on last night, about nineteen.

PARABLE. Right! How old are you?

COMFORT. How old do I look?

PARABLE. Take off those things and I’ll tell you.

COMFORT. I’ve got to dish up the dinner.

PARABLE. Bother the dinner! I’ll dish up the dinner.

COMFORT. Like you’ve laid the table.

PARABLE. I *have* laid the table—except for the things you kept on taking out of my hands. Don’t talk so much. Never saw such a girl for talking. (*She takes off the cap and apron. Puts them aside. Arranges the curls.*) Such a fuss about dishing up a dinner! Good Lord! I’d dish up—— (*She is finished and standing before him. He takes stock of her.*) Eighteen!

COMFORT. Makes us, practically speaking, the same age, doesn’t it: my looking eighteen and you feeling nineteen?

PARABLE. By Jove! So it does. Of course! That’s it. That’s what I wanted. Young society. I’ve been mixing too much with old fogies. Do you know that until last night I hadn’t danced for—why, it must be fifteen years.

COMFORT. Should have judged it to be longer, myself.

PARABLE. I must take it up again. I wonder, if

I got in an auto-piano, if Mrs. Meadows could work it?

COMFORT. Are we stopping here long, then?

PARABLE. I shall have to go up now and then. Could leave you here and come down in the evening.

COMFORT. Won't people talk?

PARABLE. Talk! What about?

COMFORT. You and me. I can see the village taking an interest in us. Especially after the arrival of that piano.

PARABLE. (*Feeling there is no denying it*) Well, let 'em! Who cares?

COMFORT. May not matter to you, sir. I've got my character to think of. I might have some difficulty in finding another place.

PARABLE. Another place! What do you mean? Aren't you satisfied?

COMFORT. I don't see it working for long, sir. If I am to spend my time dancing with you, bicycling to Henley—all that sort of thing: it may end in my neglecting my work. Then *you* may get dissatisfied.

PARABLE. Yes, I see your point. Besides, when I wanted you to—— I've got it! I'll get another cook.

COMFORT. Yes, sir. Then in what capacity should I remain, sir?

PARABLE. Oh, that will be all right. As—— What do you suggest yourself?

COMFORT. I'd rather it came from you, sir.

PARABLE. We must think it out.

COMFORT. (*Moves away*) Yes, it will want thinking out.

PARABLE. That's what I say, we must think it out. Something will come to me. I feel that.

(MRS. MEADOWS *returns, dressed in her best.*)

MRS. MEADOWS. I've given a look to the soup,

dearie. I think it's about ready. (*She seats herself at the table, at the side next the window.*)

PARABLE. Yes, let's have dinner. All this talk about a simple—— (*He goes on talking to himself, while buttlng between the cupboard and the table. He brings out a bottle, and starts to draw the cork. It does not come easily.*)

(COMFORT *exchanges a glance with MRS. MEADOWS and goes out.*)

PARABLE. Have you ever played an auto-piano, Mrs. Meadows? One of those mechanical things.

MRS. MEADOWS. You mean, sir, the thing they bring round with a monkey?

PARABLE. Something of the sort—without the monkey. You play it with your feet like a sewing-machine. Do you think you could manage it?

MRS. MEADOWS. I could try, sir.

PARABLE. I am thinking, Mrs. Meadows, of taking up my dancing again.

MRS. MEADOWS. Do you good, I'm sure, sir.

PARABLE. I find that Cook is quite a good dancer. Quite a good—— (*The cork won't come. He is getting excited about it.*)

MRS. MEADOWS. Yes, sir. She looks as if she'd got the figure for it.

PARABLE. What I want is exercise.

(COMFORT *comes in with plates and toast, which she puts on the table.*)

PARABLE. (*Giving it up*) Where did we get this claret from? I shall take it back to-morrow morning and throw it at the man's head. Here have I been——

COMFORT. (*She examines the bottle*) That's a bottle of furniture polish. Cork's got stuck, I expect. (*She goes out.*)

PARABLE. Why didn't someone say so? Might have broken a blood-vessel! (*He finds another bottle.*) Shall take up my bicycling again. Make Cook come with me. Shall put the cooking out.

MRS. MEADOWS. Put it out, sir?

PARABLE. Yes. Or else get another cook. (*He has uncorked and put the bottle in its basket. He seats himself.*) You see, what I want, Mrs. Meadows, is young society. I'm too much with old people. Makes you feel old. Now, Cook makes me feel young.

MRS. MEADOWS. I see what you mean, sir. You want her to be more of a companion like.

PARABLE. Companion! That's it. That's the word I've been trying to think of.

(COMFORT brings in the soup. She puts the tureen in front of him.)

PARABLE. (*He turns to her*) We've got it. Mrs. Meadows has got more sense in her little finger than you have in your whole body. You'll be my companion. Companion-housekeeper. Will that suit you?

COMFORT. (*She takes her place at the table the other side of him*) Yes, sir. The place will suit me all right. Isn't there another name for it, sir?

PARABLE. (*To MRS. MEADOWS*) Not satisfied yet! (*To COMFORT*) You are a fussy girl. What do you want to call yourself?

COMFORT. We'll talk it over later on. We'll see first how we suit one another.

PARABLE. (*He is helping the soup*) As if it mattered what you were called. The great thing in life is to be content. Content with your work. Content with your wages. How much do you want?

COMFORT. Soup, sir?

PARABLE. No, wages.

COMFORT. Well, sir, I believe the general rule is everything found and pin-money.

PARABLE. What do you mean, "pin-money"?

COMFORT. Mother used to have the eggs.

PARABLE. (*He regards her with severity*) That champagne last night has got into your head. By the bye—— (*He stops with the ladle in his hand*) Reminds me. Where *were* you last night?

COMFORT. Wandering about Ham Common, most of the time.

PARABLE. Ham Common! What on earth was the attraction about Ham Common?

COMFORT. None, that I could discover. Didn't happen to have enough money to go to an hotel.

PARABLE. But why the—why go to Ham Common at all?

COMFORT. I didn't. I wanted to go to Twickenham. Got misdirected by a fool of a porter and didn't reach the house till after one o'clock. Can't wake people up in the middle of the night to ask them a favor. Besides, the last train had gone. So I waited till the morning.

PARABLE. (*He turns to MRS. MEADOWS*) Can you make it out? What she's talking about—any of it?

MRS. MEADOWS. (*To COMFORT*) But what did you go there for, dearie? What did you want when you got there?

COMFORT. (*To PARABLE*) Am I to tell?

PARABLE. Do you know?

COMFORT. Yes.

PARABLE. Very well, let's have it.

COMFORT. I wanted Sunnybrook Jim to come back with me to London and bail you out.

PARABLE. Who's Sunnybrook Jim?

COMFORT. That's the name he goes by. He runs the Sunnybrook Laundry at Twickenham. Great

admirer of yours, fortunately. Only man I could think of.

PARABLE. Did he do it?

COMFORT. You wouldn't be sitting here now if he hadn't.

PARABLE. Good man! What did he say?

COMFORT. Do you want to know?

PARABLE. My dear girl, when I ask you a question——

COMFORT. He said you were a better liar than he thought you were. (*He stares at her.*) I think he meant it as a compliment.

PARABLE. I'm glad of that. Because it might be taken the other way. What was the particular lie that I told? Or was there more than one?

COMFORT. You mean you don't remember? When the police demanded your name and address?

PARABLE. (*It comes to him*) Of course. Yes, I remember. I did it on purpose.

COMFORT. That's what he was so pleased with you about.

PARABLE. I said to myself, "If my name comes out, think of the result. Ridicule upon the whole Socialist Movement. Injury to the cause of Humanity all over Europe. It must never come out."

COMFORT. We'll hope it won't.

PARABLE. It never need. I shall attend the Court on—on——

COMFORT. Tuesday.

PARABLE. On Tuesday. As Mr. "So-and-So." Pay my forty shillings—or whatever it is—and—and there's an end of it.

COMFORT. You don't think there's any danger of Mr.—of Mr. "So-and-So," the gentleman whose name you did give, cutting up rough, when he hears of it. Have you spoken to him?

PARABLE. Not yet. I shall explain to him——

COMFORT. (*Interrupting*) Do you know, sir, if

I were you, I don't think I should—not till it's all over. Unless of course you are sure he's not likely to object.

PARABLE. I wonder. You see, my difficulty is that I can't recollect for the moment what name and address I did give. (COMFORT *stares at him.*) I was a bit excited—at the time, and they said to me, "Name and address"—quite curtly; and I said—Now, what did I say?

(There comes a knock at the front door.)

PARABLE. Who's that?

COMFORT. (*Rises*) Perhaps we'll find out by opening the door. (*She slips on her cap and apron. Goes out.*)

PARABLE. I'm not at home to anyone. Say I'm not. (*He turns to MRS. MEADOWS*) I beg your pardon, won't you take some—— (*He is about to help MRS. MEADOWS to wine, but hearing the voices outside, pauses and listens, and forgets the wine.*)

(QUINCEY'S voice is heard outside—indistinctly. *He is saying, in answer to COMFORT'S information: "I'm so glad. I'm a little bit hungry myself. Came away in a hurry. Thank you so much." She is helping him off with his coat and hat.*)

PARABLE. It's that fool Quincey. What the—!

(QUINCEY *enters*. COMFORT *follows a few moments later.*)

PARABLE. (*He does not rise*) I thought I was to be left here alone, "all by myself"!

QUINCEY. That was the original idea. Who's your lady—— Oh, it's you, Mrs. Meadows. (MRS. MEADOWS *has risen.*) I wasn't quite sure—with your

back to the light. (*He fixes his eyeglasses and examines the place where COMFORT had sat.*) Were you expecting me?

PARABLE. No, I wasn't. That's Cook's place. Saves labor. (*To COMFORT, who is clearing the table*) Don't you go away. Lay for him the other side of Mrs. Meadows. What have you come for?

MRS. MEADOWS. (*To COMFORT*) I'll take those out, dearie. (*Takes plates, etc., from COMFORT and goes out. COMFORT puts a chair for QUINCEY.*)

QUINCEY. To warn you.

PARABLE. Don't talk as if you were the family ghost. What's happened?

COMFORT. Will Mr. Quincey take any soup, sir?

PARABLE. Isn't any.

COMFORT. I can easily make a little more, sir.

QUINCEY. Don't trouble, Cook. I'll miss the soup. (*To PARABLE*) Can I—(*He looks at COMFORT, who is rearranging the table*)—speak freely?

PARABLE. Mrs. Meadows and Cook know everything.

QUINCEY. You said that about Miss Bullstrode.

PARABLE. So she did. Everything that was essential.

QUINCEY. It didn't include St. James's Park and the lady.

(*COMFORT, her conscience making her nervous, knocks over a salt-cellar; some of the salt goes over PARABLE.*)

PARABLE. Ah! You've upset the salt. Thrcw a bit over your left shoulder. Quick! (*COMFORT does so, and goes out with the soup-tureen.*)

QUINCEY. Thinking that she knew, I talked to her as if she did; and—well, now she does. (*He takes the chair that has been put for him.*)

PARABLE. Well, what's it matter?

QUINCEY. That's what she is coming down to talk to you about. (*Draws the wine-basket towards him, and pours himself out a glass.*)

PARABLE. When?

QUINCEY. Can't say. I left her looking out trains. Thought I'd do a kind action by getting in ahead of her and preparing you. (*He takes a sip. Puts down his glass.*) What is this? I seem to know the taste.

PARABLE. Local claret.

QUINCEY. Are you sure? (*He pushes the glass across to PARABLE.*)

(*MRS. MEADOWS comes in with plates.*)

PARABLE. (*Takes a sip. He turns to MRS. MEADOWS*) I say, what is this?

MRS. MEADOWS. (*She smells it*) Walnut ketchup, sir. The right-hand bottles are the odds and ends. (*She lays the plates.*) I put the claret on the left. (*PARABLE goes to the cupboard, and this time exchanges it for the right bottle.*)

QUINCEY. (*To MRS. MEADOWS*) Make it yourself?

MRS. MEADOWS. Yes, sir. (*She sits.*)

QUINCEY. It's very good.

(*COMFORT brings in the bird, which she places.*)

PARABLE. (*Drawing the cork*) She can't come down to-night—Miss Bullstrode. There's no train back.

QUINCEY. She may be thinking of your spare room.

PARABLE. Well, she can't have it. Unless she likes to sleep three in a bed. Cook and Mrs. Meadows are sleeping there. (*To COMFORT*) Take off those ridiculous things. (*He puts the bottle in its*

basket on the table. Starts to carve. COMFORT goes round pouring out the wine. Finding PARABLE'S glass nearly full, and not knowing what has happened, she passes it by. Afterwards she takes off her cap and apron and sits down.)

QUINCEY. Do you know the idea that came into my head when I heard that you had taken Cook with you? *(PARABLE is struggling with the bird, and does not answer.)* That perhaps I should find the St. James's Park lady down here, dining with you.

(PARABLE puts the plates and other impedimenta away from him, clears the table round him, brings the bird close up and attacks it again.)

QUINCEY. I said to myself: "He's taken her with him to cook *recherché* little dinners for two."

PARABLE. *(To COMFORT)* What is this?

COMFORT. A duck, sir.

PARABLE. Why couldn't you say so? Here have I been struggling with the damned thing, thinking it was a chicken.

QUINCEY. And when I first came in I thought for the moment—*(He turns to MRS. MEADOWS)*—I couldn't see you plainly—I thought that Mrs. Meadows—

PARABLE. *(By sheer muscular effort he has broken the bird up. A plate with a lump of the bird on it he now holds out)* Give him that. Keep him quiet.

(MRS. MEADOWS passes it. COMFORT and MRS. MEADOWS, reaching across the table, pass vegetables, sauce, etc. QUINCEY puts up his eyeglass and examines his portion. Helps himself from the proffered dishes in silence. PARABLE meanwhile has put a plateful in front of MRS. MEADOWS. QUINCEY, through his glass, examines it. Compares it with his own.)

QUINCEY. (*In half-tone*) What have you got?

MRS. MEADOWS. I'm not quite sure, sir. (*PARABLE has helped COMFORT. QUINCEY looks across at COMFORT'S portion, and then again at his own.*)

QUINCEY. I seem to have got all the backbone.

MRS. MEADOWS. There's some nice little pickings on it, as a rule.

(*PARABLE has helped himself, has tidied up the table, mopped his brow, and sat down. He now seizes the glass nearest to him, and—eager for liquid refreshment—half empties it before he discovers that it is still the ketchup. It nearly strangles him. He sits, with eyes half out of his head, gasping. COMFORT, alarmed, rises.*)

MRS. MEADOWS. (*She is patting his back*) It's all right, dearie. It's only ketchup. You didn't change his glass.

COMFORT. Ketchup! (*She takes up her own glass to taste it.*)

MRS. MEADOWS. No, not yours, dearie.

PARABLE. No. Only mine.

COMFORT. I am so sorry.

MRS. MEADOWS. (*She takes PARABLE'S glass away and exchanges it for her own*) You'll find this all right, sir.

PARABLE. Take it away! I'm going to give up drink. I've always been meaning to.

(*QUINCEY, while they have been talking, has made exchanges between portions on his own plate and on that of MRS. MEADOWS.*)

COMFORT. (*Aside to MRS. MEADOWS*) I saw his glass was nearly full, so of course I left it.

MRS. MEADOWS. It wasn't your fault, dearie.

(She takes the ketchup glass, empties it out of the open window, and returns.)

PARABLE. When you've all done running about, perhaps some of you will come and sit down. Turning the place into a blessed roundabout! *(COMFORT scuttles back to her place.)* Thought I was going to be left alone! To have a "quiet time." As if I hadn't had enough to worry me. Up all night in a beastly little room not big enough to swing a cat in. Beastly little window you couldn't open——

QUINCEY. *(Interrupting)* Were you really at Vine Street?

PARABLE. How do I know where I was? One police court is much like another, isn't it? Think I know them all the moment I see them?

QUINCEY. Well, I've been the whole round. According to the police, there's no such name on the charge-sheet of any of them.

PARABLE. And isn't going to be.

QUINCEY. *(He grasps it)* You mean——? By Jove! You're smarter than I gave you credit for. *(PARABLE gives a satisfied grunt.)* What name did you give?

COMFORT. *(Hoping to turn the conversation)* Won't you have a few more peas, sir?

QUINCEY. *(He helps himself with a "thank you," but goes on)* Because as a rule they're up to that sort of thing. Look it up in the Directory. Then if they find it's a bogus name——

PARABLE. I thought of all that. I said to myself, "It must be a real name and address that they can verify. And it must come out pat. No hesitation, no humming and ha-ing——"

QUINCEY. *(With admiration)* Are you sure last night was your first offence?

PARABLE. *(Growing still more pleased with himself)* You see, I kept my head. The great thing on these occasions is to keep your head. I kept my

head. And when they said, "Name and address," I said straight out, without a moment's hesitation——

COMFORT. (*Who is on tenterhooks*) Pepper, sir?

PARABLE. Wait a minute! It'll come to me. I said——

COMFORT. (*Passing him the mustard*) Salt, sir?

PARABLE. (*Waving it away*) No. Don't worry.

I said—— (COMFORT jumps up with a cry.)
What's the matter?

COMFORT. Bone! Swallowed a bone.

MRS. MEADOWS. Are you sure, dearie?

COMFORT. Air! If Mr. Quincey would open the window!

QUINCEY. (*Looking round*) It is open.

COMFORT. More. More air! (*She is holding PARABLE'S coat to prevent any chance of his going. QUINCEY goes to window and opens it wider. The moment his back is turned she pulls PARABLE to her and whispers*) It was his name and address that you gave—Mr. Quincey's. (*As QUINCEY turns*) Thanks. Thanks, so much. It's all right now. (*They all re-seat themselves.*)

QUINCEY. Funny thing!—your having a bone. I thought I'd got them all.

COMFORT. It was only a little one.

QUINCEY. Yes, I don't really think it could have been a big one. (*To PARABLE*) Can't you remember?

PARABLE. It will come to me, later on.

QUINCEY. You'll have to break it to him gently. "Disorderly conduct. Meets lady friend in St. James's Park. Dances the Tango with her at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition. Sudden appearance of rival. Spirited encounter. Forty shillings or a month!" That's how it will appear in the evening papers. I can see him raising objections.

PARABLE. So can I—after it's all over.

QUINCEY. You're not going to tell him?

PARABLE. I shall explain it to him afterwards, and apologize.

QUINCEY. 'Um! I should like to be there.

PARABLE. I'll try and get you a seat.

QUINCEY. Thanks. It will be amuse——

(A knock at the front door.)

PARABLE. Who the—— *(COMFORT rises and slips on her cap and apron.)* If that's Miss Bullstrode——

QUINCEY. As it most likely is.

PARABLE. Tell her to keep the cab waiting. *(COMFORT goes out.)* She'll want it to take her back. *(To QUINCEY)* This is my being "left alone."

QUINCEY. I shouldn't mention that Cook has been dining with us.

PARABLE. Why not? An honest, respectable calling, sanctified——

(MISS BULLSTRODE'S voice is heard outside: "Nonsense! Why should I keep the cab waiting? Absurd!")

QUINCEY. *(To MRS. MEADOWS, who has risen and is clearing the table)* I expect she'll want——

(MISS BULLSTRODE strides in, followed a moment later by COMFORT.)

MISS BULLSTRODE. Sorry, but—— *(Sees QUINCEY)* Hello! You here?

PARABLE. Came to warn me—that you might be coming.

MISS BULLSTRODE. I shouldn't, if I could have helped it. *(About to take COMFORT'S seat)* Is this my place?

PARABLE. (*Draws the chair to him and guards it*) No. It's Cook's. Saves labor.

COMFORT. I'll lay for you here, ma'am. (*She brings a chair, and places it next to her own.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Sits*) Bring me a bit of bread and cheese. . Nothing else.

COMFORT. Yes, ma'am. (*She assists MRS. MEADOWS to clear the table.*)

QUINCEY. (*Breaking the awkward silence*) Pretty sunset. Did you notice it?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Very. (*COMFORT goes out with plates, dishes, etc.*) Does your cook always dine with you?

PARABLE. Why not? Why shouldn't a respectable, clean young woman, because she follows an honorable and useful calling—one sanctified by all the——

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Cutting him short*) That's enough. I only asked a question. We don't want a speech. (*MRS. MEADOWS goes out with the remainder of the things, leaving the table tidy.*) Occurred to me I'd look in at Vine Street on my way to Paddington. Happened by luck to find Inspector Wade on duty. (*She seems to expect an answer.*)

PARABLE. Oh!

MISS BULLSTRODE. Why didn't you tell us straight out that you'd given a false name and address?

PARABLE. Because I'd forgotten it, for the moment.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Your memory wants taking out and cleaning.

PARABLE. It's when I'm worried. If I could be left alone and not badgered——

MISS BULLSTRODE. The wonder to me is that you had sufficient wits left to you to think of it—after the sort of evening you'd been spending.

PARABLE. Never lose your head. The great thing on these occasions——

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*To QUINCEY*) His name must never come out. Your solicitor must attend the court——

QUINCEY. Why my solicitor? Why not his solicitor?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Because it would be fatal. There must be nothing to connect him with the case in the remotest degree. Your solicitor must attend, offer some reasonable excuse, and pay the fine.

QUINCEY. But I don't understand! What have I got to do with the case?

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Rises*) What have you got to do with it? (*To PARABLE*) You haven't told him!

PARABLE. I couldn't recollect—for the moment, whose name——

(COMFORT *returns with cheese, etc.*)

QUINCEY. (*He rises*) You mean, you gave mine!

PARABLE. I had to give somebody's.

QUINCEY. Yes. And you thought that—that I—Is that cab gone?

COMFORT. (*Puts cheese on table. Lays plates, etc.*) Yes, sir. (*Aside to PARABLE*) You'll want some more wine. (*PARABLE rises and goes to cupboard.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. Sit down. Let's talk the thing over quietly.

QUINCEY. Quietly! "Disorderly conduct at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition. Mr. Archibald Quincey, the well-known journalist and writer, meets lady friend in St. James's Park——"

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Interrupting*) With your influence you can keep the thing out of the newspapers altogether.

PARABLE. That's what I said to myself. I said,

"Quincey can hush it up. The right man is Quincey." (*Goes on talking half to himself: "Some people would have lost their heads and blurted out their own name. I kept my head," and so on.*)

(MRS. MEADOWS comes in, bringing coffee-cups on a tray. She places them on an oak chest near the door, and reseats herself at the table. QUINCEY and MISS BULLSTRODE are too excited to take any notice of her, or of COMFORT.)

MISS BULLSTRODE. If Parable's name were to leak out, of course it would be impossible.

COMFORT. (*Aside to PARABLE, who is drawing the cork*) Sure it is claret? (*He proudly shows her the bottle. She is satisfied. She takes off her cap and apron and sits.*)

QUINCEY. (*He has been impressed by the argument*) And even if I do—keep it from just the outside public! Every penny-a-liner in court will know and talk. What about my reputation?

MISS BULLSTRODE. You're surely not going to let that weigh against the whole future of Socialism in England! Against the possible success or failure—

PARABLE. (*Comes to the table with the wine, which he pours out*) What we've got to do is to stand shoulder to shoulder.

QUINCEY. Yes. Next time you give somebody else a chance. (*Sits.*)

PARABLE. (*Sits*) I thought you would be pleased.

QUINCEY. Silly ass! Mind, if it ever occurs again——

PARABLE. As a supporter of the cause of——

MISS BULLSTRODE. Don't talk so much. You've got out of this by the skin of your teeth. You thank your lucky stars——!

(*A knock at the front door. COMFORT rises and reaches for her cap and apron.*)

PARABLE. Leave it open. (COMFORT goes out.) Put up a notice, "Wipe your feet and come straight in"—I'm tired of hearing that knocker. How many more——

(There rushes in MISS DORTON, wildly agitated. It looks as if she is going to drop into the seat just vacated by COMFORT.)

PARABLE. (He stretches out a defending arm) You can't sit there. That's Cook's seat. (He tilts it up. QUINCEY reaches for a stool that was near the window and puts it for her between himself and MISS BULLSTRODE. MISS DORTON staggers round the table.) What's the matter with her? (MISS DORTON drops on to the stool, lays her head on the table, and bursts into tears. PARABLE turns to QUINCEY) I asked you to take her out and cheer her up. What have you been doing to her?

(COMFORT has followed in. She wears her cap and apron. She busies herself tidying up the table.)

MISS DORTON. (Speaking through her sobs) I've seen the magistrate.

MISS BULLSTRODE. What magistrate?

MISS DORTON. The magistrate who is going to try the case on Tuesday. He's going to give him "seven days." (Sobs.)

MISS BULLSTRODE. Why should he give him "seven days"?

MISS DORTON. He says he always gives "seven days" in cases of unprovoked assault.

MISS BULLSTRODE. But it wasn't unprovoked. The other man began it.

MISS DORTON. I put it to him that way. He said—— (She is too overcome to continue.)

MISS BULLSTRODE. I shall shake her in another minute.

MISS DORTON. He said, "If the other gentleman liked to come forward and acknowledge that he began it, that then—that then——" (MISS BULLSTRODE *is about to carry out her threat.*)

QUINCEY. (*He intervenes, pats MISS DORTON on the shoulder soothingly*) Yes, that then——?

MISS DORTON. That then the other gentleman could have the "seven days." (*Collapses into sobs.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. This is the work of our enemies. This hussy, who lies in wait for him in St. James's Park—this Delilah——!

COMFORT. (*Who has been listening, comes forward*) Have you finished—with the cheese, ma'am?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Yes. Take it away. (COMFORT *goes out with the cheese.*) The whole thing is a plot. (*To MISS DORTON*) You didn't tell him—the magistrate—that it was Mr. Parable?

MISS DORTON. No. He thinks, of course, that it was Mr. Quincey.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*To QUINCEY*) You'll have to do it.

QUINCEY. Do what?

MISS BULLSTRODE. The seven days.

QUINCEY. Sorry! But I feel that it wouldn't agree with me.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Man alive! Don't joke about it.

QUINCEY. I'm not joking. I'm trying to keep my temper.

MISS BULLSTRODE. "John Parable sent to prison." Why, the whole world——

QUINCEY. And what about me? Doesn't anybody care for me?

MISS BULLSTRODE. You don't matter.

MISS DORTON. All the enemies of humanity will rejoice.

QUINCEY. Let 'em. Why shouldn't they ever enjoy themselves? I'll see the Socialist Movement and all the Lost Cats and the future of Humanity and the whole damn bag of tricks——

(A knock at the front door. It brings a sudden silence.)

PARABLE. *(To MRS. MEADOWS)* We must have an "At Home" day here. Third Fridays, 9 to 11. I can't stand this sort of thing every evening. *(The knock is repeated, louder.)* Why doesn't somebody answer the door? *(MRS. MEADOWS goes out.)* Where's Cook? Always running in and out, in and out. It's——

MISS BULLSTRODE. Hush!

(The voices of SUNNYBROOK JIM and MRS. MEADOWS are heard indistinctly. JIM is saying: "Can I see Mr. Parable for a few minutes?" MRS. MEADOWS: "Well, I'll see. What name?" SUNNYBROOK JIM: "Mr. Howells. Won't keep him a minute. It's very important." MRS. MEADOWS comes to room door.)

MRS. MEADOWS. A Mr. Owl, sir, would like to see you.

PARABLE. A Mr. what?

MRS. MEADOWS. Owl, sir, it sounds like.

PARABLE. I don't know any Owls. Send him in. *(He again tilts COMFORT'S chair forward to the "engaged" position.)*

MRS. MEADOWS. Will you please come in? *(She pushes open the door.)*

(SUNNYBROOK JIM passes her and enters. He is in motor-cycling costume. MRS. MEADOWS goes away, leaving the door ajar.)

JIM. Comrades all—greeting!

PARABLE. Yes. I haven't the pleasure——

JIM. James Julius Howells, commonly known as Sunnybrook Jim.

PARABLE. Ah! Then you're the man that bailed me out.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*To MISS DORTON, who bursts again into sobs*) Control yourself. (*QUINCEY soothes her.*)

JIM. Only too gratified to have been of service to the Cause.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Won't you sit down? (*She goes to put COMFORT'S chair for him. PARABLE rescues it.*)

JIM. Thank you, Comrade Gwendoline. I've been sitting down, on a new saddle, and I'd just as soon stand up.

PARABLE. Won't you lean against something?

JIM. (*He waves aside the suggestion, produces from inside his coat PARABLE'S hat of yesterday, and holds it out*) Is that your hat, sir?

PARABLE. (*Takes it*) Yes. Where did you get it?

JIM. From the young woman in charge of the Cigarette Kiosk at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition. It was just outside her place that you had your little scrap, sir.

PARABLE. Very possibly. I don't myself remember.

JIM. According to her—(*He addresses the company generally*)—it wasn't Mr. Quincey's fault.

QUINCEY. (*He leaves off soothing MISS DORTON, whose sobs take the form of a running accompaniment to the conversation generally*) Wasn't whose fault?

JIM. Quincey is the name of the gentleman I went bail for.

QUINCEY. Very likely. If you think that I'm going——

MISS BULLSTRODE. Do be quiet. Let the man finish.

JIM. She is willing to support any evidence we may bring forward that the other gentleman began it.

PARABLE. He called me a half-baked chimpanzee and knocked my head off—I mean my hat.

JIM. That's the man we've got to lay our hands on.

MISS BULLSTRODE. But how? We don't even know his name.

JIM. Information concerning his name and address I have hopes of obtaining from the young woman.

MISS BULLSTRODE. What young woman?

JIM. The young woman that took Mr. Parable out last night. If I'd known as much as I do now, I should have asked for it this morning when she called to see me about the bailing out. (*MISS DORTON would seem to have been reserving herself for the sob that here escapes her.*) If I'm any judge of females, she's taken a fancy to Mr. Parable. (*PARABLE for the first time becomes really interested.*) What I shall say to her is this: "Somebody has got to do 'seven days.'" Mr. Quincey, I take it, retires.

QUINCEY. Hear, hear! Hear, hear!

MISS BULLSTRODE. Order!

JIM. "Which shall it be? Mr. Parable or the other gentleman?" I shall be surprised if she doesn't plump for Parable.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*She turns fiercely on PARABLE*) Who is she? Don't pretend you don't remember.

PARABLE. (*After the manner of Ajax defying*

the lightning—but with perhaps more dignity) I am going to do the “seven days” myself.

MISS DORTON. You can’t!

PARABLE. Can’t! Can’t do—— Do it on my head!

JIM. Have you ever tried it, sir?

PARABLE. Not yet. It will be an interesting experience.

(COMFORT comes in with the coffee-pot. She busies herself getting ready the coffee. JIM recognizes her. They exchange a glance. None of the others take any notice of her.)

JIM. If you will take my advice, sir, you will let me ask the young woman the name and address of the gentleman who began the row.

PARABLE. I’m going to do the “seven days” myself. Haven’t had a holiday for years. The rest will do me good.

MISS BULLSTRODE. But why? Why, if the other man really began it, and the hussy is willing to give us his name——

PARABLE. Because, if you want to know, I’ve taken a dislike to him. I don’t want anything more to do with him. I’ve done with him. She’s done with him. We don’t want to hear anything more about him.

MISS BULLSTRODE. You mean that for the sake of this, this——

PARABLE. I mean——

MISS DORTON. He mustn’t do it! Don’t let him do it!

MISS BULLSTRODE. You are willing to sacrifice the cause of——

PARABLE. I’m going——

JIM. Perhaps the young woman will speak for herself.

(There is a silence. Then follow exclamations: "What young——?" "Who?" "Where?" etc. Then they turn their eyes and see COMFORT.)

COMFORT. *(She comes forward with her tray)* Mr. Joseph Onions, 118 Broadway, Hammersmith, is the gentleman you are looking for. I have just written asking him to be at Mr. Parable's chambers to-morrow afternoon at six o'clock.

(So soon as they get their breath, they are off again.)
MISS BULLSTRODE: "You! It was you, you—!"
MISS DORTON: "Cook! Oh, Cook, how could you!"
QUINCEY: "Well, I'm—I" etc., etc.)

PARABLE. *(He looks for a chairman's hammer. Uses the nearest thing handy)* Silence, everybody. This is my affair. *(He turns to COMFORT)* Has that letter gone?

COMFORT. Mrs. Meadows was fortunate enough to just catch the post.

PARABLE. When I see him to-morrow I shall tell him he can go back home and nurse his head. I am going to do the "seven days."

COMFORT. I fancy he'll want to do them himself, sir.

PARABLE. Why the devil should he?

COMFORT. I've promised him that when he comes out I'll be his "companion-housekeeper." There is another name for it. Coffee, sir?

CURTAIN

ACT III

SCENE: *We are back again in JOHN PARABLE'S study in Buckingham Street, Strand. It is the afternoon of the following day. The room is empty, but from MISS DORTON'S den comes the faint clicking of her typing machine.*

PARABLE enters. *He wears a light overcoat and his proper hat, and carries the despatch-case that we saw him packing yesterday morning. He leaves the door open, and, crossing to the fireplace, rings the bell for ILLINGWORTH. He goes to the desk, opens his despatch-case, takes things out, puts things in. A pile of letters, opened and arranged by MISS DORTON, catches his eye. He takes up the top one, glances at it.*

PARABLE. Let 'em. I don't care. *(He takes off his overcoat and throws it across a chair, flings the hat after it.)* These women—there's too many of them. That's what's the matter with them. Too many of them. *(He takes up another letter.)*

(ILLINGWORTH comes in. He would immensely like to know what brought them all back. But a butler has himself always under control.)

ILLINGWORTH. Good afternoon, sir.

PARABLE. Is the water hot?

ILLINGWORTH. The water, sir?

PARABLE. For the bath. I'm going to have a bath.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir. I think so, sir. I'll see.

PARABLE. Pack my bag. For Scotland. I'm going to Scotland. By the eight-thirty.

ILLINGWORTH. Alone, sir?

PARABLE. What do you mean—"alone"? Of course I'm going alone. Put in my walking boots. I'm going a walking tour.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir. What time shall I tell Cook——?

PARABLE. You can tell Cook to go to the devil. She can cook her dinners for herself and her beastly little rotter of a rent collector! I shan't see him. They can settle it all among themselves and do what they like. I'm going to have a bath. Let me know when they're all gone. (*Continues packing—and unpacking his bag.*)

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir. Will you be away for long, sir?

PARABLE. I don't know. Shan't come back till I feel better. If ever I do.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir. Then I'm not to order dinner?

PARABLE. I don't want any dinner. Tell her to eat it herself.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir.

PARABLE. Tell her I hope it'll choke her.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir. (*Goes out, taking PARABLE'S hat and coat with him.*)

PARABLE. Obstinate, pig-headed! (*Knocks over the telephone*) Damn!

(MISS DORTON *emerges from her den.*)

MISS DORTON. I thought I heard you.

PARABLE. I shan't see him.

MISS DORTON. Shan't see whom?

PARABLE. What's his silly name? Onions. You can settle it among yourselves and do what you like.

Tell Illingworth to let me know when you're all gone. I'm going to have a bath.

MISS DORTON. You know that Cook had returned?

PARABLE. I don't care anything about Cook. I don't want to hear anything about her. I'm ashamed of her. A girl who is going to marry a beastly little rotter that she doesn't love. Just because he's done "seven days." What's "seven days"?

MISS DORTON. How do you know she doesn't love him?

PARABLE. How do I—— Have you seen him?

MISS DORTON. No.

PARABLE. Well, then, wait till you do. Don't talk so much. Hope he'll bully her and make her life miserable. That's just what she wants. Someone to bully her. Obstinate, pig-headed! (*He refers to the letters she has brought in with her*) I don't want to see them. I don't want to see anything or anybody. (*He waves them away*) I'm going to Scotland.

MISS DORTON. When?

PARABLE. By the eight-thirty.

MISS DORTON. How long will you be stopping?

PARABLE. Till I feel better. It may be years.

MISS DORTON. But there's your meeting at Kingsway Hall. Your lecture on Wednesday——

PARABLE. I don't care. I don't care about anybody or anything. I'm going to put a shirt and a pair of stockings in a knapsack and walk about Scotland. If that doesn't do me any good, I'll chuck everything and go into a convent. Get a little peace and quiet before I die. (*QUINCEY is shown in by ILLINGWORTH. PARABLE turns on QUINCEY*) I shan't see him. You can all of you settle it among yourselves. I'm going upstairs to have a bath. If he isn't gone when I come out, I shall kick him downstairs. (*He goes out. Immediately puts his head*

round door again) Don't forget. If I find him here when I come out, I shall kick him downstairs. And anybody else that's left about. (*Goes out, slamming the door.*)

MISS DORTON. I've never known him like this.

QUINCEY. Um! Perhaps his bath will do him good. Has anybody else come?

MISS DORTON. Not yet. Cook's here.

QUINCEY. Where?

MISS DORTON. In the kitchen.

QUINCEY. In the kitchen? Bit of a change for her. How long has she been his cook?

MISS DORTON. She came at Christmas.

QUINCEY. Um! Little present from Santa Claus apparently. Who engaged her? You?

MISS DORTON. No. Illingworth. She seemed so respectable.

QUINCEY. Yes. My mother always had them fat and forty. Much safer.

MISS DORTON. Yes. It would have been better. Of course we never dreamt he was that sort of man.

QUINCEY. No. Bit of a surprise to himself, I expect. Rather decent of her—(*In answer to Miss DORTON's look of inquiry*)—giving up her chance of being Mrs. Parable.

MISS DORTON. You don't think he would have married her?

QUINCEY. Perhaps not. But she might have married him.

MISS DORTON. But he's engaged to Miss Bullstrode.

QUINCEY. Yes. It was his only chance of escape.

MISS DORTON. You mean—— Doesn't he want to?

QUINCEY. Marry Miss Bullstrode! Do you mean for pleasure?

MISS DORTON. But she will be so helpful to him.

QUINCEY. Very. They will share the same—platform. On all questions of Social Reform their hearts will beat as one. She will bring him children. She's been promised fifty to begin with. It's going to be called the "John Parable School for the Training of Future Citizens." He will be the chairman. His cranks will be her cranks, and his fads will be her fads. She will criticize him, argue with him, and boss him till death doth him release. And for the sake of that, he is giving up one of the best and most attractive cooks that man was ever——

(PARABLE barges in. MISS DORTON snatches up some papers from desk and scuttles back to her den.)

PARABLE. Look here. It's just occurred to me. He didn't begin the row.

QUINCEY. Oh!

PARABLE. No. He came up to me quite politely and asked me to leave the Exhibition.

QUINCEY. By the nearest exit and without another moment's loss of time.

PARABLE. That was all he said. And instead of going, I answered quite rudely that I should do nothing of the kind.

QUINCEY. Upon which he called you a "half-baked chimpanzee" and landed you one on the smeller.

PARABLE. Afterwards. After I had been rude to him.

QUINCEY. Question for the magistrate.

PARABLE. Just so. If I can prove to him that I began the row, then this blighter—what's his name?—Onions, won't get his "seven days."

QUINCEY. So much the better for him.

PARABLE. Yes. But don't you see the point? She has promised to marry him when he comes out

of prison. If he never goes in, he can't come out.
(*Much pleased with his own cleverness.*)

QUINCEY. Question for the lady. I fancy that if he comes forward, she will consider herself bound.

PARABLE. Yes. But she's no right to promise to marry a man she doesn't love. It's immoral. You can't enforce an immoral contract. It's an immoral contract.

QUINCEY. It's a nice point. How do you know she doesn't love him?

PARABLE. Why did she leave him to find his way home with only one eye—that was of any use to him—while she spends the night trying to get me bail?

QUINCEY. (*Impressed by this point*) What does she say herself? Have you talked to her?

PARABLE. Have I talked to her! Obstinate, pig-headed—says she's given her word.

QUINCEY. Um! Sort of girl to keep it. Unless by any chance—— (*The dawn of an idea comes to him*) What's he like, this man Onions?

PARABLE. You'll see him in a minute.

QUINCEY. (*Working out his idea*) You say the police turned up in the third round. Were you still fighting?

PARABLE. Yes.

QUINCEY. Why did they run you in, and let him go?

PARABLE. They didn't "let him go." He was gone!

QUINCEY. Um! "Safety first." Prompt, business-like young man. Wonder if he could be persuaded to help us?

PARABLE. He!

QUINCEY. Only one man who can make her break her word; that's Mr. Onions.

PARABLE. Why the devil should he help us?

QUINCEY. Business-like young man. Doesn't say

yes or no. Says he'll turn up this afternoon at six o'clock and "talk it over." Might do it without meaning to.

PARABLE. You mean—you think he'll refuse?

QUINCEY. No. I think he's going to accept. (PARABLE *makes a movement of impatience.*) Merely an idea of mine. Don't expect it will come to anything. In which case, nothing for it but for you to marry Miss Bullstrode and make the best of it.

PARABLE. I don't want to marry Miss Bullstrode.

QUINCEY. Much more suitable match.

PARABLE. No. it isn't. I'm not old enough. I don't feel old enough.

QUINCEY. You will in a year or two.

PARABLE. Don't try to be funny.

QUINCEY. I'm not trying to be funny. I'm trying to comfort you in case you have to. Think of your duty to the public.

PARABLE. I shan't marry Miss Bullstrode: see if I do. I'm going to Scotland, and from there very likely I shall go on to Iceland. When I come back, if ever I do——

(SUNNYBROOK JIM is shown in by ILLINGWORTH.)

QUINCEY. Ah! Comrade James. (*The three shake hands. QUINCEY turns to PARABLE*) What about that bath of yours?

PARABLE. I'm going to have it now, and when I've had it, I'm going straight off to Scotland. And it's no good writing to me, because there won't be any address. When I come back—if ever I do—I shall join the Church of England and go into Parliament as Tariff Reformer. (*Goes out.*)

JIM. What's the matter with him?

QUINCEY. Seems to have been a case of love at first sight. At all events, love at first sight of her in her best clothes.

JIM. I thought as much. Lucky we chipped in, in time.

QUINCEY. Why lucky?

JIM. Well, we don't want him marrying that sort.

QUINCEY. What's wrong with her?

JIM. I'd have been in Parliament, Mr. Quincey, if it hadn't been for Mrs. Howells. What am I now? A respectable married man with a family.

QUINCEY. Doing well, I hope?

JIM. All doing well. Takes the revolutionary spirit out of you somehow. *(He sinks into an easy-chair.)*

QUINCEY. And you think Miss Pryce might turn out to be another Mrs. Howells?

JIM. Put me in mind of her the moment I saw her. Just the sort of young woman that makes you fancy things ain't so bad as they are. You know what I mean. Now, Miss Bullstrode will keep him up to the mark.

(MISS BULLSTRODE is shown in by ILLINGWORTH. A transformation has taken place in MISS BULLSTRODE. She has taken QUINCEY'S advice. She wears curls, an ultra-fashionable frock, and a saucy hat. The effect is not altogether successful. She has rather overdone it. For a moment they do not recognize her.)

MISS BULLSTRODE. Good evening. *(To JIM, who has risen)* So glad you are here. *(Aside to QUINCEY)* You see, I've taken your advice.

QUINCEY. Allow me. *(He arranges her turban.)*

MISS BULLSTRODE. I ought to have done it long ago. *(To JIM)* Is Mr.—Mr.—

QUINCEY. Onions.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Mr. Onions. Have you seen him?

JIM. Called twice and he wasn't in. Got him on the 'phone eventually. He'll be here at six o'clock. (*Looks at his watch.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. Ah, good! Where's Parable?

QUINCEY. He's having a bath.

MISS BULLSTRODE. A bath?

QUINCEY. We are to do what we darned well like and let Illingworth know when we're all gone.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Still grumpy?

QUINCEY. Might almost say ratty.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Um! Perhaps just as well. We'll be able to get the thing settled without so much talk. Where's the girl?

QUINCEY. In the kitchen.

MISS BULLSTRODE. We must get her out of the house at once. How soon can the marriage take place?

QUINCEY. Whose marriage?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Hers with this—what's his name?—Onions. We don't want this thing hanging about.

(*PARABLE bursts in again—in bathroom costume.*)

PARABLE. It's just occurred to me. Suppose—
(*He sees MISS BULLSTRODE. At first he doesn't know who it is. They stand looking at one another. MISS BULLSTRODE conscious that she has made changes. He turns, goes straight out, closes the door softly behind him.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. What's the matter with him? Is he crazy?

(*ILLINGWORTH opens the door.*)

ILLINGWORTH. A Mr. Onions has called.

QUINCEY. Where's Mr. Parable?

ILLINGWORTH. Having a bath, sir.

QUINCEY. Yes. That's what we thought. Do you mind just running upstairs and letting me know exactly how far he has got?

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir. *(Goes out.)*

QUINCEY. If he's going to come barging in every two minutes, I can see our not making much progress. *(He goes to her door, opens it and calls)* Miss Dorton! *(MISS DORTON comes out.)* We may want you. *(She crosses to the desk and sits.)*

(ILLINGWORTH reappears.)

ILLINGWORTH. Mr. Parable has just stepped in, sir.

QUINCEY. Thanks. That gives us ten minutes, anyhow. Please ask Mr. Onions to come in. *(ILLINGWORTH disappears.)*

JIM. Six to the minute. Nice, business-like young man.

QUINCEY. Yes. He seems——

(ILLINGWORTH announces: "Mr. Joseph Onions," and retires. MR. ONIONS is a gentleman of about thirty, neatly dressed in black. His head is adorned with various bandages.)

ONIONS. *(He bows to the company generally)* Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. *(They murmur a "good evening" in response.)*

QUINCEY. Mr. Parable is unfortunately not able to be present. Our little affair can, I daresay, be settled without him.

ONIONS. Quite possibly.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Won't you sit down?

ONIONS. Thank you—— *(He hesitates over the name.)*

JIM. Miss Bullstrode, friend of Mr. Parable. *(They bow.)* Mr. Quincey, friend of Mr. Parable.

(*They also bow.*) Miss Dorton, Mr. Parable's secretary. (MISS DORTON and ONIONS bow.) Now we can get to business.

ONIONS. That's the ticket. (*He sits.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*She is seated in PARABLE'S chair at the desk. She turns to QUINCEY, who is seated near her—on her right*) Will you?

QUINCEY. (*Shakes his head. She makes another silent appeal to him, but he is firm*) No. You.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Squaring up to it*) Well, Mr.——

ONIONS. (*Supplying the missing word*) Onions.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Mr. Onions. It's all very simple. You're in love with Mr. Parable's cook. (MISS DORTON *wipes away a tear.*)

JIM. (*Who is standing with his back to the fire*) Miss Pryce.

MISS BULLSTRODE. With Miss Pryce. If I may say so, a very charming and attractive young woman. (*There is no response.*) And—well, you naturally want to marry her. (*Again there is no response.*) Well, don't you?

ONIONS. I wanted to six months ago. She said she didn't like the name of Onions.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Cheerfully*) No. Well, of course—— Still, you can't help that.

ONIONS. That's what I told her.

MISS BULLSTRODE. We women, Mr. Onions, are allowed the privilege of changing our minds. The young lady has, I understand, written you a letter?

ONIONS. Asking me to go to prison for seven days in place of Mr. Parable.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Quite so. (*Archly*) But afterwards! After the seven days are over. Wasn't there some little mention of a reward, Mr. Onions? After all, what are seven days? Think of Jacob!

ONIONS. Mr. Howells mentioned Jacob—over the 'phone.

JIM. It did come into my mind.

MISS BULLSTRODE. It seems to me, Mr. Onions, to afford a precedent. After the "seven days"—

ONIONS. (*Interrupting*) After doing his "seven days" for him, I am still further to oblige present company—(*Looks around*)—by removing the young woman out of his reach. (*They are all taken aback.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. What do you mean, "out of his reach"?

ONIONS. I may be mistaken, and I may not. But I have an idea that Mr. Parable—left to himself—might upset present company's plans by getting himself spliced up to the young lady. (*MISS DORTON is unable to suppress a moan.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. I tell you quite frankly, Mr. Onions, that if you let slip this chance there is a possibility of Mr. Parable's cutting you out. If you take my advice, you will close on Miss Pryce's offer while it still holds good.

ONIONS. Yes. But would it be fair?

JIM. Fair!

ONIONS. To the girl. For me, a poor man, to spoil her chance of becoming Mrs. Parable. That's what I'm asking myself.

MISS BULLSTRODE. But she offers to marry you!

ONIONS. To sacrifice herself. I may be only a poor man, and I may be fond of the girl. But love should never be selfish.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Too staggered for argument*) You mean—— You're going——

MISS DORTON. But think, Mr. Onions. Would it be selfish? Wouldn't——

ONIONS. (*Interrupting with finality*) That's what my conscience tells me.

MISS BULLSTRODE. I can't follow your argument. It seems to me——

MISS DORTON. How could he? Don't you see—
(ONIONS *remains a statue of incorruptibility.*)

QUINCEY. (*Striking in*) What have you come here for? To talk moral sentiment?

ONIONS. (*He takes an immediate dislike to QUINCEY. He changes his tone*) No, Mr. Quincey, I haven't. I've come here to try and do the best, under the circumstances, for all parties concerned.

QUINCEY. Yourself included?

ONIONS. Myself included, if you've no objection, Mr. Quincey.

QUINCEY. Not in the least. Only wanted to get to the point. What are your terms?

ONIONS. Well, sir, I'm a poor man in a small way of business, and in this world, as you know, sir, there is a prejudice against parties that have done time, however short.

QUINCEY. "Hammersmith Auctioneer and Estate Agent does battle for his lady love!" Might be a good advertisement.

ONIONS. I thank you, Mr. Quincey. I had thought of something of the kind myself. Not, I admit, so neatly put. But with a middle-class clientele there is always a risk. And seeing you ask me my terms——

JIM. For admitting what you can't deny and what we have evidence to prove. That you began the row.

ONIONS. Not until I had received provocation. He was sitting there with his arm round her waist. There's no other word for it. (*He turns to Miss BULLSTRODE*) I am sorry to have to say it, Miss Bullstrode, but he was cuddling her. (*MISS DORTON is unable to suppress a sob.*) I have witnesses who are prepared——

QUINCEY. (*Interrupting*) What's your figure?

ONIONS. For opening my mouth to say that I

knocked off the hat of a gentleman whose name I don't know? And then shutting it up again and keeping it shut?

QUINCEY. That's the idea.

ONIONS. Five hundred pounds.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Five hundred! Five hundred pounds for——

QUINCEY. Yes, that's about what I was prepared for. That seems reasonable. (ONIONS, *who has been anxious, looks relieved. He has a more friendly feeling towards QUINCEY.*)

MISS DORTON. Who's going to pay it?

QUINCEY. (*Shrugs his shoulders*) It was John Parable's evening out. (MISS DORTON *groans.* QUINCEY *risés and goes to the desk*) I take the responsibility, Mr. Onions, of accepting your terms: two hundred and fifty down, the balance immediately after the case has been satisfactorily disposed of.

ONIONS. What I should have suggested myself, Mr. Quincey. Always a pleasure to do business with a business man.

QUINCEY. Thank you. (*Takes a check-book from his pocket*) No objection to a check, I presume?

ONIONS. None in the least, Mr. Quincey.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Who is still simmering*) Um! Well, I think Mr. Onions has done pretty well for himself. (*With a short, bitter laugh*) Five hundred pounds and a charming wife.

ONIONS. I beg pardon.

MISS BULLSTRODE. I said five hundred pounds and a charming wife.

ONIONS. Whose charming wife?

MISS BULLSTRODE. Whose charming wife! Why, your charming wife, Miss Pryce.

QUINCEY. (*Who is seated at desk writing check*) Christian name, Mr. Onions?

ONIONS. Joseph, sir. Joseph Onions, Esquire. (*He turns to Miss BULLSTRODE*) Sorry, ma'am. But I thought I'd explained that I shouldn't think it right to come between Miss Pryce and her chance of making a very excellent match.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Aghast*) Wouldn't think it right! But you've promised! You named your own terms: five hundred pounds——

ONIONS. Nothing said about marrying the young woman.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Nothing said! Of course it included—it was understood. (*Turns to QUINCEY*) Didn't you understand?

QUINCEY. As a business man, I'm afraid I must agree with Mr. Onions. The five hundred pounds does not include the removal of Miss Pryce. (*Again QUINCEY goes up in the estimation of Mr. ONIONS.*)

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*Rises*) It's a swindle. It's a damned swindle! He gets his money, and leaves the hussy on our hands.

ONIONS. Of course I don't go so far as to say that I won't marry the young woman—provided the affair can be settled in a friendly way.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (*To QUINCEY*) What does he mean by "in a friendly way"?

QUINCEY. (*Crosses to ONIONS*) Shall we say another five hundred? A thousand in all. Nice little sum to start the nest on.

ONIONS. I couldn't do it, Mr. Quincey. I really couldn't. I may be old-fashioned, but in my opinion a woman's reputation should be above reproach.

QUINCEY. What are you talking about?

ONIONS. (*It might seem difficult, having regard to the material, but he contrives to suggest the unpleasant*) Out all night—wandering about the neighborhood of Ham Common. So I understand from Mrs. Howells.

JIM. You've been down to my place, worming things out of my wife?

ONIONS. Not worming, Mr. Howells. A little friendly chat.

QUINCEY. (*To MISS BULLSTRODE*) You see his point?

ONIONS. Make it a thousand and the whole affair is ended in an amicable spirit.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Let him have it. It will serve her right.

QUINCEY. (*To ONIONS*) To be paid immediately after the ceremony. (*He puts a slight stress on the "after."*)

ONIONS. That will be quite satisfactory, Mr. Quincey. You're a gentleman, sir.

QUINCEY. Thank you. We may as well, to avoid any possible misunderstanding, have it in writing.

ONIONS. It was what I was about to suggest, Mr. Quincey.

QUINCEY. (*He turns to MISS DORTON*) Do you mind? (*She takes up her notebook. He dictates*) "Dear Mr. Quincey——"

MISS DORTON. (*Surprised*) "Dear Mr.——?"

QUINCEY. (*Repeats*) "Dear Mr. Quincey,—In consideration of the sum of two hundred and fifty pounds, receipt of which I hereby acknowledge"—see there's a stamp on the letter—"together with a further sum of two hundred and fifty to be paid to me by you on the morning of——" When does the case come on?

JIM. Tuesday.

QUINCEY. "—on the morning of Wednesday the 11th inst., making five hundred pounds in all, I agree to withdraw all claim against Mr. Parable in respect of any material or moral damages he may have inflicted on my person on the night of Thursday the 5th inst." (*To ONIONS*) Better to put it

that way. Avoids any suggestion of tampering with the law.

ONIONS. Excellent, Mr. Quincey—excellent!

QUINCEY. (*Returning to his dictation*) New line. "In consideration of a further sum of one thousand pounds to be paid to me by Miss Bullstrode——"

MISS BULLSTRODE. Blood-sucker!

QUINCEY. "—immediately after my marriage with Miss——" What's her Christian name?

MISS DORTON. Comfort.

QUINCEY. "Miss Comfort Pryce, I hereby consent and undertake to marry that young woman." Full stop. "This one thousand pounds to cover the damage I consider has been done to her reputation by her having spent the night of Thursday the 5th inst. wandering about the neighborhood of Ham Common." (*To ONIONS*) So there can be no further discussion on that point.

ONIONS. Quite so, Mr. Quincey—quite so.

QUINCEY. "—I am, dear Mr. Quincey, yours sincerely." Make it out in duplicate and add to Mr. Onion's copy: "Dear Mr. Onions,—The above correctly summarises the agreement at which we have this day arrived. Yours sincerely." Then Miss Bullstrode and myself will both sign it. (*To ONIONS*) Just a friendly memorandum.

ONIONS. (*Approving*) As between friends.

QUINCEY. (*As MISS DORTON is going*) Be as quick as you can.

(*MISS DORTON disappears into her den. The click of the type-machine starts almost immediately. QUINCEY seats himself and stretches out his legs. MISS BULLSTRODE has risen and, with her hands behind her, is looking out of the window. JIM is still standing, his back to the fire, with his hands in his pockets. ONIONS is seated, his*

hands folded over his abdomen, looking into the future with deep content. A vender of bananas passes down the street, crying his wares. He dies away.)

QUINCEY. Mrs. Meadows was looking very well, I thought, last night.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Very. (*Continues looking out of window.*)

(*A newsboy is heard callings "Winners. All the winners. Special." He dies away.*)

QUINCEY. (*To JIM*) Pretty neighborhood, Ham Common. Not far from Richmond Park, is it?

JIM. Not far. Could I have a nip of brandy, do you think?

QUINCEY. Certainly. Do you mind? The bell's just on your left. (*JIM rings. QUINCEY turns to ONIONS*) Nothing permanent, I hope, Mr. Onions. (*Referring to bandages.*)

ONIONS. A mere temporary inconvenience, I thank you, Mr. Quincey.

QUINCEY. Ah, sorry! (*ILLINGWORTH looks in.*) Oh, bring Mr. Howells a little brandy, will you, Illingworth?

JIM. Neat, please.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir. (*Goes out.*)

QUINCEY. (*To JIM*) You'll feel better when you get into the air.

JIM. Yes. I'll be glad to get out.

QUINCEY. Yes. I daresay we all—— (*MISS DORTON comes back with the copies typed.*) Ah, here we are! (*He rises and takes them from her*) If you'll sign this one, Mr. Onions. (*He puts it on desk, ready for ONIONS to sign. The other copy he puts for MISS BULLSTRODE to sign*) And if you'll sign just here.

(ILLINGWORTH comes with the brandy. JIM tosses it off with a curt "Thank you.")

QUINCEY. (MISS BULLSTRODE has signed in silence and gone back to the window. He takes the pen from her and he also signs. He stands waiting till ONIONS has finished reading and has signed.) Correct?

ONIONS. All correct.

QUINCEY. (They exchange copies. QUINCEY at the same time hands ONIONS his check) The balance to be posted to your address—all being well—on Wednesday morning.

ONIONS. I thank you, Mr. Quincey. The other little check after the ceremony.

QUINCEY. After the happy event. (To JIM) Perhaps you will show Mr. Onions the nearest way to Vine Street and introduce him to Inspector Wade. (Aside) You have had some brandy?

JIM. Yes. Perhaps I'd better have another dose. (He helps himself.)

QUINCEY. (To ONIONS) I think, Mr. Onions, that is all. Till we meet again on Tuesday. Good evening.

ONIONS. Good evening, Mr. Quincey. Quite a pleasure to have met you.

QUINCEY. Thank you.

ONIONS. Good evening, ladies.

MISS BULLSTRODE. (Snaps out a curt) Good evening.

MISS DORTON. (Murmurs a faint) Good evening.

ONIONS. (He comes back a step. JIM has gone out. ILLINGWORTH is waiting) Oh, you might mention to Miss Pryce, in case I don't see her, that everything has been settled in a friendly way.

QUINCEY. I'll break it to her myself.

ONIONS. Thank you, Mr. Quincey. Good eve-

ning. (*Goes out. ILLINGWORTH follows and closes door.*)

MISS DORTON. I do hope we've done right. (*Wipes away a tear.*)

QUINCEY. We avoid any risk of his getting seven days' quod. That had to be done.

MISS BULLSTRODE. And the risk of his making a still greater fool of himself by marrying a designing minx. When he comes to his senses, he'll be grateful to us.

QUINCEY. One never can tell. It's a thankless world.

(ILLINGWORTH *looks in.*)

ILLINGWORTH. I beg pardon, but Mr. Parable's compliments and he would like to know when you are all gone.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Oh, for goodness' sake, let's go! (*She bounces round, snatches up her bag, etc.*)

QUINCEY. Tell Mr. Parable that Miss Bullstrode was sorry she couldn't stop, that Miss Dorton has been called away, and that Mr. Quincey will be gone in precisely five minutes. Please ask Cook to step up.

ILLINGWORTH. Yes, sir. (*Goes.*)

MISS DORTON. (*She has on her hat*) You don't think he'll want me?

QUINCEY. I feel sure of it.

MISS BULLSTRODE. Tell him he can write to me when he's sober. (*She sweeps out.*)

QUINCEY. (*To MISS DORTON as she is going*) I may look in to-morrow morning.

(MISS DORTON, *dropping things and picking them up again, goes out crying. A few moments and then COMFORT enters. She wears her cap and apron.*)

QUINCEY. Good evening, Cook.

COMFORT. Good evening, sir.

QUINCEY. Do you mind closing the door? (*She does so.*) Thank you. Won't you sit down? (*She sits.*) Forgive the question, and answer me quite frankly. Do you—care for him?

COMFORT. (*Defiantly*) Yes. I'm not ashamed to own it. I do care for him more than any man I've ever—— (*She looks up*) Who are you talking about?

QUINCEY. Mr. Joseph Onions.

COMFORT. (*In a very different tone*) Him! Oh, yes, he's all right.

QUINCEY. I see. And in spite of that you are going to stick to your bargain.

COMFORT. What was I to do? I couldn't let him go to prison. A public man in his position. All the papers making fun of him. He'd have done it if I'd let him, silly kid! (*She smiles without knowing it.*) Later on—well, he might have wished he hadn't.

QUINCEY. More than likely. Suppose by any chance he—this Mr. Onions—doesn't get his seven days—that the magistrate lets him off with a fine?

COMFORT. (*Doggedly*) I've given my word. I shan't play tricks.

QUINCEY. (*He takes from his pocket the document that MR. ONIONS has signed and hands it to her*) Read that.

COMFORT. (*Reads in silence for a moment. Then aloud*) "Material or moral damages—inflicted on my——" (*Looks up*) What's all this about?

QUINCEY. I thought it better to put it that way. For five hundred pounds he turns up on Tuesday and acknowledges that he began the rumpus. Read on.

COMFORT. (*She reads it through in silence. Looks up*) Who told him?

QUINCEY. That you spent the night of Thursday

the 5th inst. wandering about the neighborhood of Ham Common? Mrs. Sunnybrook Jim, in the course of what Mr. Onions describes as a "friendly chat." It's going to cost Miss Bullstrode an extra five hundred pounds, that episode. But for that, he might have accepted five hundred instead of a thousand.

COMFORT. (*She looks again at the document*)
To be paid after the ceremony.

QUINCEY. There's always the possibility of a slip.

COMFORT. I think I can save her the whole thousand.

QUINCEY. You are going to break your word?

COMFORT. Yes.

QUINCEY. Good girl. (*Up to this, COMFORT has been icily calm. Now she gives way. Is about to tear the document in two. QUINCEY stops her just in time.*) But don't vent your temper on valuable documents that don't belong to you. That's John Parable's property. Fold it up neatly. (*She does so.*) And hand it to him next time you see him. (*He holds out his hand.*) Good evening—Cook.

COMFORT. (*She hesitates a moment. Then suddenly she takes his face between her hands and kisses him. The next moment she is herself again*) Good evening, sir.

QUINCEY. (*He goes out into the passage, from where one hears him call*) Illingworth!

ILLINGWORTH. (*Faintly heard*) Mr. Quincey.

QUINCEY. Tell Mr. Parable I couldn't wait any longer.

ILLINGWORTH. (*A little nearer*) Thank you, sir.

(*The front door is heard to bang. COMFORT stands thinking, takes off her apron, thinks again. Then with set determination she puts it on again; going to glass over fireplace and arranges*

her cap. She waits. After a few moments PARABLE pushes open the door.)

PARABLE. (*In door, looking out*) Is my bag ready?

ILLINGWORTH. (*From a distance*) I'm seeing to it now, sir.

PARABLE. Well, hurry up. (*He comes in and slams the door. He has his despatch-case in his hand. He does not see COMFORT. He goes to the desk. COMFORT sniffs. In another moment she will cry. He looks round.*) What are you doing here?

COMFORT. Waiting for you.

PARABLE. I don't want any dinner. I shan't eat any. I'm going to Scotland by the eight-thirty. I shall get myself some cold beef at Euston.

COMFORT. You know cold meat doesn't agree with you. You've plenty of time for me to grill you a chop.

PARABLE. Never you mind what I've got time for. You will have plenty of cooking to do for Joseph Onions.

COMFORT. If I do, I'll give him rat poison.

PARABLE. (*He stops and stares at her*) Why? What——

COMFORT. Because it's what you do give to rats.

PARABLE. (*Springing to hope*) He's refused?

COMFORT. No, he hasn't. He's going to turn up at Bow Street on Tuesday, and he's willing to marry me. (*She begins to explode*) He's not only willing, he "consents and undertakes" to marry me. And that in spite of my damaged reputation, caused—— Read it. (*She produces her document, dashes it open, and thrusts it into his hands.*) Never mind the beginning. Read the end. Not there. Here. Here. (*By this time she is off her head.*)

PARABLE. "In consideration of a further sum——"

COMFORT. Read the end.

PARABLE. I'm trying to get to the end. What do you want me to do? Read it backwards? (*He escapes from her by walking round the table.*)

COMFORT. (*Following him*) If you think I'm going to marry that miserable little—— "In consideration of the further sum"—"to be paid by Miss Bullstrode——" I'll save her that, anyhow.

PARABLE. (*Who has struggled through it*) Have you done talking?

COMFORT. No. Shan't, so long as I think of it.

PARABLE. How did you get hold of this?

COMFORT. Mr. Quincey. Told me to read it and then give it to you.

PARABLE. Good old Quincey!

COMFORT. He "consents" to marry me. He "undertakes" to marry me. And that in spite of—

PARABLE. Don't talk so much. (*He doesn't know it, but the cave-man lingers in him. She looks at him and obeys.*) What are you going to do about it?

COMFORT. (*A meek young person with round, childish eyes*) I don't know.

PARABLE. Ever been married—in Scotland?

COMFORT. (*Shakes her head*) No.

PARABLE. Like to?

COMFORT. (*He has not moved. Unconsciously she has been moving towards him. By this time she has reached him*) Yes.

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